The Telling Lives Oral History Curriculum Guide

The Columbia University Center for Oral History
(formerly the Oral History Research Office)

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INTRODUCTION

In the Spring of 2004 the Columbia University Oral History Research Office led a program to bring professional oral history training to eight 7th and 8th grade English Language Arts and Social Studies classrooms in two Manhattan Chinatown schools. This pilot project was the latest and largest initiative in our Telling Lives Program, which grew out of our work after 9/11 and which aims to take oral history beyond the archive, stimulating the use of oral history in schools and community organizations. To learn more about this program and the ideas behind the Chinatown Telling Lives Project, see Mary Marshall Clark's foreword: The Story of Telling Lives, starting on page 4.

Over the course of 18 sessions—nine weeks—we taught students how to interview and to use audio recording equipment, guided them through life history interviews with a variety of fascinating people in their communities, and helped them to make sense of the stories they heard. Working with the Museum of Chinese in the Americas, students created a multimedia exhibit and full color oral history books featuring their work and their interviewees' stories. One class created a video documentary.

Based on our experience with this program and others, as well as our professional experience in oral history methodology, we have created this Telling Lives Curriculum Guide. There are many oral history curricula available, both online and in print. We thought it was worthwhile to create this guide because our curriculum is different: it scaffolds the teaching of professional oral history technique; it features both the group, classroom interview and the one-on-one interview; it emphasizes the life history approach; it includes an exploration of the oral history interview as a literary as well as an historical text; and it includes the creation of public, creative, final products.

Because most of our experience has been in middle schools, this curriculum is most directly applicable to a middle school setting; we provide a sample eighteen-lesson unit map, similar to what we used in Chinatown, and two sample one-week units. But the ideas, activities and lesson plans we present here can easily be adapted to shorter or longer projects and used with other age groups.

In this curriculum you'll find comprehensive lesson plans, sample interviews, stories about our work in the classroom, tips of all kinds, essays, and many supporting activities. We hope you can use some of what you find here to build an oral history curriculum that fits your class. You'll hear the voices of our director, of oral history educators, the important voices of teachers, of museum educators, psychologists, oral history interviewees and students.

We hope you will be able to use this guide to bring many more voices into your students' worlds. We hope you'll consider using oral history in your classroom.

With questions or comments, please feel free to contact the Center for Oral History, 212-854-2273. This guide is a work in progress. We welcome your feedback, your stories, and your ideas.

FOREWORD: The Story of Telling Lives

Mary Marshall Clark, Director of the Oral History Research Office

The Old Terror

Terror has become a trendy word, but it is an old reality. Terror existed before 9/11[01]. Terror has a special meaning for children, sometimes even before they know it as a word. It has an even more special meaning for migrant and immigrant children, whose life stories have often been shaped by the forces of globalization which include the terror of hunger, in the United States the terror of the INS, and in too many parts of the world the terror of a lost future. In 2001 the Oral History Research Office created an oral history project on the terrorist events and their aftermath. While George Bush and others described the 9/11 terror as a "new" reality, it was still an old reality (now sharpened) for many of those we interviewed.

Some whom we interviewed remembered, when we asked them to tell us their life story, the story of their grandparents' lives. For many of the younger immigrants we interviewed (especially from Afghanistan), it was the parents' and grandparents' stories that helped them overcome their temporary alienation after 9/11 that literally broke the silence imposed by fear and ignorance. These stories were not told as instructional tales, rather they were handed down like family jewels, containing poetic symbols and metaphors too precious to wear except for special occasions, which helped untangle the lies that the U.S. government was telling about the "new terror" and the "new enemy." They were family stories, community stories, on their way to becoming life stories: infusing the younger generations with the courage to face the fact that 9/11 was nothing new. Most children, even citizen children, knew that already, as it is harder to dupe them with the idea that if terror hasn't happened here--inside U.S. borders--it isn't real and it isn't terror.

The Telling Lives project originated in June 2002 through grants from the New York Times 9/11 Neediest Fund. We had already done a year of interviewing, in which we had completed nearly 600 interviews with survivors and witnesses. In that time we all had seen a lot of suffering, and we had also seen the ways in which oral history provided a relief from the pressure of that suffering, by transforming it into stories, by telling. The Telling Lives project was created to explicitly explore the ways in which oral history could be used to alleviate suffering: particularly in vulnerable communities and particularly in settings where we could work with children and youth.

Why Chinatown?

Part of our 9/11 work was always to investigate the silences. In the collective silence that temporarily settled over New York on September 11th 2001, the streets of Chinatown were probably quiet a few days longer than some others. The silence lived longer in Chinatown in part because, unlike in many schools around New York City, there was not the friendly buzz of high-powered vacuums cleaning out rooms where 9/11 dust seeped into every crevice. Despite the fact that the towers fell not a mile away, there was an

intense focus on the site of the attack, which excluded other communities from deep coverage. The Board of Education largely left the work of reaching out to the families of Chinatown to private psychological agencies. The one we partnered with, New York University Child Study Center, was the major institute that reached out: to hundreds of families—but few children and families responded to the western techniques of counseling. In the fog of the aftermath, after the first rush of collecting oral histories with New Yorkers in a wide variety of communities, including Chinatown, we realized the mistake we had made in not going there sooner, in more numbers, and with more resources. One of the most vital and diverse and culturally rich communities in New York, with a multigenerational legacy of stories, with a partner to the Oral History Research Office (the Museum of Chinese in the Americas-MoCA), Manhattan Chinatown was an ideal site for our work.

A teacher, Stacey Fell-Eisencraft, was already using oral history in her classroom in Chinatown: to encourage students (as we were doing with adults) to make meaning of 9/11 in their own ways: in this case interviewing elders about their experiences of loss, trauma, and recovery. Dr. Marylene Cloitre, a psychologist we were working with on our 9/11 project to teach us about how to interview witnesses to catastrophe, took a new job at NYU Child Study—and voiced concern that in Chinatown traditional western methods of treatment might not be as effective as storytelling and oral history. Tom Roderick, Metro Director of Educators for Social Responsibility, shared the idea that maybe oral history could help the kids who had resorted to violence in the aftermath of 9/11 understand each others' cultures and ethnicities. And this is how the Telling Lives project, a public oral history project, was born. Ultimately, we worked in a collaborative partnership: MoCA, OHRO, NYU Child Study and Downtown Community Television: a creative video training facility which mentors urban youth. Through a proposal written by Dr. Cloitre and myself to the ChevronTexaco Foundation, which had previously supported the work of the Child Study Center, Columbia was awarded a very generous grant to underwrite a project for youth in Chinatown in the public schools. The story of success in our first year of this project is rooted completely and utterly in this collaboration. Finally, the most important partners were the schools (Dr. Sun Yat Sen Middle School 131 and Manhattan Academy of Technology) and the teachers themselves. Their knowledge and their enthusiasm for the projects we undertook through oral history made the work possible.

What were the goals of the project, and the purpose of the collaboration? In order to subvert the silences imposed on youth whose lives were already complicated, already "too real" in a way, one purpose of the Telling Lives project was to treat the youth as actors, not victims, in the search for meaning. We decided not to make 9/11 the explicit focus of the work—in deference to the fact that it was simply one of many stories—but to work through its shadow by connecting it to other narratives. The story of this project that inspires me is the one of a young African American girl who, after hearing the story of Josephine Prins (a Holocaust survivor), wrote this line in a rap poem in homage of Josephine: "You just can't let the Holocaust hold you back!" I didn't know her well, but in one of the few times I met her I asked her, "If you can't let the Holocaust hold you

back, how do you feel about 9/11?" "You can't let Osama bin Laden hold you back either," she declared. And that is the story of this project, and the oral history process.

Chapter One:
What is Oral History?

This chapter will introduce you to our version of oral history through a frequently asked questions list, an essay on "The Art of the Oral History Interview", a set of mini lessons to introduce oral history to your class, and a list of helpful hints for oral history interviewing. Like all of the chapters that follow it, Chapter One will end with a sample interview. This first interview is with New York City Emergency Medical Technician Jay Swithers, who talks about working in an ambulance during the 1980s in New York City and living through the collapse of the Twin Towers.

Oral history is important because it passes one's life down the line.
-Sandy, 7th grader at MS 131

Oral History Curriculum FAQs

What do you mean by oral history?

Oral history is valuable **firsthand** testimony of people's experiences of history. **We always take the "life history" approach.** For example, if we're interviewing an eyewitness to the events of September 11th, we don't start on September 11th. We start on the day they were born – and sometimes we start before they were born, asking them to tell stories about their parents, grandparents and the community they're from. We believe that these stories are not a tangent to the real story of September 11th; we believe that they help us to see who the person is and how that person's particular point of view was formed. Oral history takes point of view seriously. For more on how this actually works, see The Art of the Oral History Interview in the next section, pages 14-18 and 25-27.

How do I integrate oral history into my existing curriculum?

Oral history can be connected to your existing curriculum both thematically and in terms of skills. Oral history can be useful in almost any class, and is especially rich when done in an interdisciplinary collaboration. For example, a Social Studies teacher can spearhead the oral history project, working with an English teacher to support the interviews with other reading, an Art, Drama, or Photography teacher to help the students create a public presentation of their work, and a Keyboarding or Computer teacher to do the transcription. Oral history has also successfully been used in math and science classes. See the Heritage Community Foundation's archived site: http://www.youthsource.ab.ca/teacher_resources/oral_overview.htmlfor project ideas by subject area. For more in-depth treatments of the place of oral history in the English and Social Studies classroom, please see Oral History as a Literary Text, Oral History as a Primary Source Document and interviews with English and Social Studies teachers, in Chapter Two: How Does It Look in the Classroom?

How can oral history work with standardized testing?

In Social Studies, an oral history project can greatly enhance students' skills in using primary source documents and bring real, deep understanding of the historical periods researched by the students. Oral history is directly applicable to Document Based Questions, which in New York State are a central component of 8th grade and Regents testing.

Transcribed oral histories are living, vibrant, student-created documents, which can be used as sources for any text-based exercises in English test-prep. Teachers at Middle School 131 have even successfully used oral histories as source material for five paragraph essay practice! The student engagement in intensive speaking, listening, writing, and reading in an oral history project improves language skills in countless ways. For more on using oral history in test prep, see the interview with teacher Bryce Bernards, starting on page 46.

Students are excited by oral history, they are engaged, and with careful teaching they learn more because of it.

How does oral history meet standards?

Oral history, with its focus on reading, writing, speaking, and listening, can be used to help students meet all four of the New York State standards for English [http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/ela/elarg.html] n researching, hearing, analyzing, and presenting people's first-hand accounts of history, students can be helped to meet all five of the New York State Social Studies standards [http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/ssrg.html].

Where do I go to find interviewees?

Wherever you teach, we are *sure* there are plenty of people around with exciting stories to tell. Start with the people you know. How many of them have lived through some significant moment in history? Try the school. One of our most successful interviews at Intermediate School 126 was with the school janitor. Ask students to ask their parents to come in to be interviewed. Try community organizations, churches, synagogues, and mosques. Try your local branch of the Veterans of Foreign Wars or perhaps a local pacifist organization. Senior centers and homes are always good.

When you find people, make sure they are comfortable with the process and know what to expect. A pre-interview is invaluable to you in helping the students navigate the life story and to the interviewee in seeing what oral history is. We send letters to our interviewees (see p. xx) telling them about our process and our project. It is essential to have at least a brief conversation with the interviewee before the interview starts so you can explain what you're looking for – stories, rich detail, and personal experiences. Once your students are comfortable talking about oral history, you can ask a student to introduce the project at the start of the interview. See The Art of the Oral History Interview (pages xx and xx) for more on this.

What are some examples of classroom oral history projects?

There are many exciting possibilities. Students might interview people who can give firsthand testimony about historical events such as the Great Depression, the Second World War, the Vietnam war, or the civil rights movement. But the interviews don't need to be centered on the event. They can help increase students' understanding of particular themes that teachers might be addressing in their classrooms: for instance, discrimination, immigration, or work. Studs Terkel's work includes collections in both of these traditions.[1]

[1] Through his books and radio program, the late Studs Terkel probably introduced more people to oral history any other individual in America. A brilliant editor and interviewer, he published many collections of thematically connected, edited interviews on topics such as death, work, race, World War II, and The Great Depression. See http://studsterkel.org/ for more information, including audio samples and curricular materials built from his work.

In our classrooms students heard firsthand testimony from a wide variety of people about their personal encounters with history. Students interviewed people who have lived through major historical events ranging from the Holocaust to September 11th. But they also heard smaller, less dramatic—though still compelling and important—stories of immigration, life in the neighborhood forty and fifty years ago; stories about ordinary people living through difficult times. For descriptions of four classroom oral history projects, see page xx.

What if the interview upsets the interviewee or my students?

Oral history brings the outside world, with all of its complexities and surprises, into your classroom. It's a good idea to pre-interview people you interview as a class, in order to find engaging narrators and to make yourself aware of any stories to which you might not want to expose your students. Graphic war stories, stories of physical and sexual abuse, and suicide stories, for example, may not be appropriate for many students. We told our students that they were free to leave the room if they didn't want to listen to a particular story. We do not believe that it is possible or desirable to avoid displays of strong emotion in a good oral history interview. It is a good idea to prepare students for the fact that people they're interviewing may feel, and act, sad, angry, and vulnerable. The connections and empathy that students feel when intently listening to an emotional story are an important part of the learning taking place in an oral history project.

A few tips: Ask your students what concerns they have about the interviewing process, and address them. Have them be interviewed themselves, and draw their attention to how it feels to be interviewed. Have tissues ready. If you sense that your students are uncomfortable – or if you are uncomfortable with where the interview is going—you can use oral history to change the subject. Don't make it into too big of a deal. Don't make the kids feel guilty for feeling bad. Don't make the interviewee feel guilty and self-conscious for having told a personal story – just move on. Ask a good oral history question to change the subject. And, of course, be observant to the difference between healthy empathy with the interviewee and signs of trauma or abuse that may need to be brought to the attention of the guidance counselor.

Can I use this curriculum outside of middle school?

Yes. You know your students and what they can handle best. The curriculum has been tested with 7th and 8th grade students, but it is designed to be flexible, and could just as easily be used in high school and even elementary school. High school students generally can handle deeper historical contextualization and more analysis of interviews on this level, as well as more transcription. Younger kids need shorter interviews, perhaps with more teacher intervention. Classroom Interviews: A World of Learning, by Paula Rogovin (Heinemann, 1998) is an excellent book on interviewing in the elementary grades.

What kind of equipment should I use?

Do not let a lack of equipment, or a small equipment budget, keep you from trying an oral history project. A single recording set up which can capture sound good enough for transcription allows for a rich oral history project. Having more equipment and/or better equipment increases your options for final products and archiving.

In 2005, we used portable Sony minidisc recorders and lavaliere (clip-on) mikes. We bought one for every eight students—this was just enough to allow each student a few days to do their at-home interviews. Of course, only a few years later, this technology is no longer current. We recommend researching current standards and buying the best equipment you can afford: see below for useful websites. A good microphone is probably the most important thing to buy. Avoid using the built-in microphone on a recorder if at all possible. Quality equipment excites students. If you use high quality equipment you might then be able to use the sound for museum exhibits, radio documentaries, or professional archives. This shows everyone involved in the project how important the life stories you collect are. Equipment is changing so rapidly that we hesitate to recommend a specific model. The latest information can be found at a new site, Oral History in the Digital Age: http://ohda.matrix.msu.eduThe Vermont Folk Life Center also maintains a web site that has excellent, up to date information on audio equipment: www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/res_audioequip.htm. The site also contains links to sites that focus on specific media and manufacturer's web sites.

Do we need to transcribe the interviews? How?

Professional oral histories are almost always fully transcribed. Transcription protocols vary widely, and transcription can be very time consuming. You, the teacher, will have to decide who will do the transcription (you? students? a paid transcriber?) and how much of the interview to transcribe (the entire interview? just segments?). Transcribing can provide students with valuable experience in punctuating, spelling, writing dialogue, and listening. It can also be frustrating and boring. We have often asked students to transcribe their favorite two pages of the interviews they do on their own.

It can cost over $100 per tape hour to pay someone to transcribe. It's often easy to find transcribers through local colleges and universities. Make sure to give your transcription guidelines to your transcriber. One thing to keep in mind is that most transcribers prefer to work off of cassette tapes, which they can slow down. If you're recording on another medium, make sure to think about how to transfer to a cassette. For more information on transcription, please see our transcription mini-lesson and Guidelines for Transcription handout.

Do I need money for my oral history project – and where can I find it?

An oral history project can be done with no money, using whatever equipment is around. However, if you need money for transcription, equipment or a more elaborate final product, here is a list of a few places that might give small grants to teachers for oral history:

Donors Choose: www.donorschoose.org/

Public Education Network: http://www.publiceducation.org/newsblast_grants.asp
NEA Foundation: www.nfie.org/programs/grantguides.htm
Nike Foundation: http://www.nikebiz.com/responsibility/nike_giving_guidelines.html

The Foundation Center (http://foundationcenter.org/) is a good place to start in looking for funders. Included starting on page 124 is a sample of a successful grant proposal written by two of our participating 8th grade English teachers.

Isn't it true that oral history is often factually inaccurate?

We don't go to oral history only for the facts. We go to oral history in order to learn what people say about their experiences of historical events. We go to oral history for a sense of the way life used to be, what perhaps it meant to live in a—remote—historical period. How life has changed, and how it remains the same. We go to oral history to understand not the objective facts but how people subjectively recall or perceive their experiences. Oral history looks for insights into the processes of memory—the ideas and needs behind the way people arrange their memories into stories or narratives. Oral history acknowledges that there are many true stories and questions the nature of truth.

Oral history can also be the source of vivid, particular, powerful facts. Part of the teacher's work in teaching oral history, especially in a Social Studies framework, is to contextualize the interviewees' stories, giving students the tools to explore the deeper implications of the fact/fiction dichotomy. In an English *or* Social Studies classroom, the subjective nature of oral history provides an excellent context for explorations of point of view, author intentions, et cetera.

What about interviewing in a language other than English?

Think of your classroom. If you have students who speak a language other than English, think of all the possible voices that could allow your students to hear.

In our work in Chinatown, because we interviewed so many immigrants and because our project took place in an immigrant neighborhood, we often came across interviewees who spoke little or no English. Their stories were important and so we invited them to be interviewed anyway. On one occasion, we had our Mandarin-speaking students translate the interviewee's responses. Four or five students came up to the front of the room, sat with our interviewee, sometimes conferred with her before doing the translation and then translated for the class. Afterwards, the translator-students all said they felt proud that they had been chosen and had been able to translate the interview.

When we interviewed a Cantonese-speaking former garment worker, we had her come in with another, English-speaking union organizer, and divided the class up into Cantonese-speaking and non-Cantonese-speaking groups to do interviews in their own language. We were able to do this because we had a Cantonese-speaking mental health clinician in

the classroom that could supervise the Cantonese group. We had that interview transcribed in Cantonese and partially translated by one of our project staff. At a senior center where interviewees spoke many languages, we were able to match each interviewee up with a group of students who spoke their language.

Students were encouraged to conduct their home interviews in a language other than English. If they chose this option, they were required to translate the two page transcription they turned in with their interview. All of these activities were excellent opportunities for second language learners to engage in authentic speaking, listening, and translating skills, and to have their native language abilities honored in school.

How much time do I need to do an oral history project?

An oral history project can be as simple as a single interview, done in one class period. Students with no instruction in interviewing will still be able to get something out of the interview. We have found that, if possible, oral history should be done in a double (90 minute) period, because it often takes some time for the interviewee and the students to get warmed up. Your interview may be only forty-five minutes or an hour long, but it is helpful to have some time before and after it for everyone to get comfortable and to say goodbye.

An oral history unit can be a focus of your class for a period of time, ranging from a week to several months. It is also possible to infuse oral history interviews throughout your curriculum, the same way you use books or the Internet. See pages xx and xx for samples of one week and nine-week oral history units and projects.

What are the legal and ethical issues involved in doing oral history?

It is important that you explain clearly to your interviewee what the goals of your project are, what to expect during the interview, and how their interview will be used. In professional oral history, the standard is to allow interviewees to read their transcripts and make changes before asking them to sign a release. This gives the interviewee the maximum amount of control over their story. In classroom oral history, where interviews may not be fully transcribed and time may not allow for a lengthy process of going back and forth before permission is given to use the interview, we usually ask interviewees to sign a release immediately following their interview. We always use a release, even if we don't have any immediate intention of using the interview beyond the classroom because, like quality equipment, it greatly increases the potential uses of the work. The sample release we've included (p. xx) gives the school a wide range of rights to use the interview but allows the interviewee to retain literary rights to their story. There are many release forms available online if the one we've supplied doesn't suit you. Although most release forms give you permission to use the interviewee's story in any way you wish, it adds an interesting new level of engagement if you take the time to allow interviewees to look at how you've presented their story and give students feedback.

Oral history interviewing is based on a foundation of deep engagement, which requires a respectful and trusting relationship between the interviewer(s) and the interviewee. Of course, it is essential that you follow through on any promises made to the interviewee in regards to copies of tapes and transcripts or invitations to events. We usually send a letter of invitation before the interview which explains what will be expected of the interviewee and what they can expect to get back from the process (this can be as simple as the pleasure of sharing their stories) and follow up with a written thank you letter from the students.

The Oral History Association has an excellent set of evaluation guidelines posted under "Publications" on their website at http://www.oralhistory.org/. There is a special section on Educator and Student Guidelines that is written for teachers.

What if I don't know anything about oral history?

After reading this curriculum, we think you'll know a lot about oral history. If you can, it is helpful to do some reading or take a workshop; probably the best and easiest way to prepare yourself is to just go out and do an interview or two. You may want to read through some of the books on oral history in our resources section, on page 109. If you don't have the time, it is perfectly OK for you to learn right along with your students. The most effective way to learn oral history interviewing is by practicing, and you will set an excellent example for your kids, showing yourself as an enthusiastic, risk-taking learner.

Note: There are also excellent FAQs for students *and* teachers at tellmeyourstories.org

THE ART OF THE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW, PART 1

Gerry Albarelli

I. IMAGINING THE FACTS

Oral history is the firsthand testimony of people's experiences of history. Some people worry that oral history is factually inaccurate history. But we don't go to oral history for just the facts; we go to oral history to understand the sense that people make, the stories they tell, about their experiences of history. We go to oral history to understand the human cost, the human experience of history.

At the same time oral history has a healthy respect for the facts. For the facts of power—who has it, who does not. For the hard facts of wars, revolutions, poverty, landscapes so fraught they might have been invented. This is why we always begin the interview by asking—*where and when were you born; tell me a little bit about your parents; what did they do for a living; was it a religious household; what about politics*—all those things that will tell us who this person is, what experiences in the world of facts have created this particular point of view. We establish the point of view, the background, by means of particularity and by means of the anecdote—*give me an example of what you mean; is there a story that would illustrate that; what kind of person was your mother; tell me a story about her.* And from there we move on to the focus of the interview, the reason for the interview.

But we go at an un-fact like pace. We proceed more as a novelist might proceed, leisurely, with time to develop plots subplots, character, a sense of time, a sense of place, a sense of humor. There is room for all of these things in an oral history interview, especially if the interviewer allows there to be room. It is up to the interviewer to establish that the oral history interview proceeds at a very measured pace, unlike the journalistic interview which has been unduly influenced by deadlines.

An oral history interview should have unlimited time (at least in theory) for the stage to be set; for the characters to be introduced.

Oral history should read, then, like a good novel. It should use descriptive language. It should have plenty of dialogue. It should be evocative; there should be room for feelings in it, though the feelings are often implicit. It should be sensual.

It should establish by particularity, by means of the story or anecdote told in a personal voice, what it means to live in a world of facts.

I am thinking of Shui Mak Kah, who came to our eighth grade class, who told students about the Japanese invasion of Manchuria which she experienced when she was a girl.

She told this story in detail. It was the details that had stayed with her; it was the details that made such an impression on our students. Here, translated from the Cantonese, is a piece of her story:

When I was four or five, the Japanese came and attacked us. They bombed us; they bombed us using airplanes. My house had four stories, including the roof, it was five. There was this balcony that was very big. There were three bedrooms. Each floor had three bedrooms. The bedrooms were huge. The railing to the balcony was very tall. When I was four or five, I was tiny, so I took a chair and put it against the railing to look at the planes. When the airplanes flew in, I didn't know what was going on. I thought to myself, "The airplanes are so cute." I started shouting out to them. "Helloooo!" The Japanese pilot replied, "Helloooo," and started waving at me. Before I knew what was happening, there was an explosion. The trains exploded. They bombed the train station. And when the Japanese started attacking, the planes and the bombing were constant.

I was four or five then, and I had an older brother. My brother was still in elementary school. He was attending the village elementary school. He heard the bombing and ran to me to take me away. Surrounding our village was a thicket of bamboo. Our village had dug trenches, like a cellar, underneath the bamboo in case of bombing—we would be safe from the bombs because of the bamboo. When we heard the bombing, we rushed for the cellar. My brother carried me on his back and he started running. I was too heavy for him. He couldn't carry me anymore, so he threw me into a field. He covered me with some yam leaves because yam leaves are thick and dense, and he continued running. There was another explosion. My hair was done up in a pigtail and my back was to the plane when it came by, and the bullets started flying from the machine gun. My pigtail was shredded by the machine gun, and my hair was as short as it is now. I didn't know what had happened. When the planes left, my brother came looking for me; he had crawled into the cellar. When he found me alive, I was crying because I lost my pigtail.

What is oral history good for, what does it have to offer that standard histories do not? Oral history allows for the messy but inevitable human contradictions that exist around, between, and in spite of the facts. Like literature, its not so distant cousin, oral history can bring us the startling image of war, can make us see war again in a way that numbers and statistics can never do, in a small girl's pigtail.

II. AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED

"And then what happened" is probably the most important question you'll ask—it certainly should be the one you ask the most frequently—in an oral history interview.

It's important to remember that an oral history interview is a narrative about the past. It is the story of certain experiences, of events, that take place over time, usually a long time ago. You are trying to find out what happened, or at least what the person thinks happened.

Instead of asking for opinions or for a description of how someone was feeling about something in the past, ask for a description of the events to which those feelings and opinions are attached. This will help the interviewee to keep one foot in the past, so to

speak. The opinions and the feelings will surface in the telling of the events, either implicitly or explicitly.

For instance, in interviewing a former member of the Communist Party, someone who broke with the Party, rather than ask the question, *Why did you leave the Party?* you might, in an oral history interview, ask the question this way: *Tell me about your decision to leave the party. Do you remember an event that led to that decision? Do you remember the day that you left the Party?*

To the extent that an oral history interview is about ideas, it is about the dramatization of ideas and the consequences of ideas. Or put another way: about how ideas are played out in time and space.

It is the job of the oral historian and the oral history interview to make the abstract particular and concrete—to fix the abstract, whenever possible, firmly in time and space.

Oral history is always about a particular day, a particular moment, and a particular place. "Tell me," you might say, "about the day when you thought, 'I've had enough of this job.'" "Tell me about the day of the strike." "Tell me about your first day in the army." "Tell me about the most frightening thing that happened to you on your job?" "Tell me what it was like in Tennessee when you were a little girl. Describe your house. What do you remember?"

If you are going to ask a general question or make a general statement, then ask for a particular example to back it up. For example, in interviewing a police officer you might say, "You say things were different when you came out of the Academy from what you had been expecting and what you had been led to believe about the job. Tell me about something that you experienced that really made that clear to you."

This series of events and experiences, the narrative flow that connects one event to another, is really at the heart of an oral history interview. (And although chronology can be a good structure to help middle school students to navigate a life story, it is only one possible organizing principle for this narrative flow.) This is the thing that people who are new to oral history often don't understand: that you are asking a very simple question (and you are bound to get a complex answer): What happened? And then? And then what happened?

III. THE GIFT OF THE PAST

If not the facts, then what is the oral history interview recording? What is it you're trying to teach your students to get? Not the facts but rather a visceral sense of the past, a sense of what it meant to be alive at a particular—and usually particularly distant—point in time, what it was like to live through a historical catastrophe and maybe to come out the other end.

This sense is contained in the voices of the people, in the cadence of speech that is the music of another time.

We need to summon up the past. We need to ask about ordinary life in order to hear the extraordinary. What did your neighborhood look like? What is your first memory? What did you do as a child for fun?

Here is Shui Mak Kah again, remembering distant childhood:

My birth was quite legendary. I was actually born on February 23,1930. When I was born—the village where I used to live had built an ancestral temple—I was born exactly on the day of the one-year anniversary of the temple. They had to pay respects to the ancestors exactly at twelve o'clock midnight, and I was born right on the dot. When I was born, our servant came to tell my father, "Master, master!"—my father was the 4th among 8 brothers and 1 sister—"Fourth Master, you have gotten a basket of silver!" Boys were gold, and girls were silver. My father was delighted, because I had two brothers, and now he had gotten a daughter, so he was very happy.

When I was little, I used to throw rocks at frogs, or catch fish, clams and things like that in rivers and ponds. Once, when I went fishing—sometimes there were holes in the mud, and leeches lived inside those holes, and sometimes you could even find eels in the holes. So I thought there were eels inside this particular hole. I stuck my hand inside the hole, and pulled something out, and it turned out to be a snake! I immediately flung it away, and asked people to kill it. Ever since then, I never went fishing again.

This is the gift of oral history: the sense of discovery and rediscovery on both sides of the interview; its ability to close up the distance between the past and the present, to bring far places near; the way in which it reminds us that the past is not over as long as there is on one side a teller and on the other a listener prepared to receive, in story form, the gift of the past.

IV. HISTORY OF A NOBODY

I operate on the assumption that people are natural and practiced storytellers; they have lifelong experience telling stories about what has happened to them and to the people around them. I also operate on the assumption that most people don't feel up to the task of the interview. The first thing to do is to tell people—and you'll have to tell them more than once—that the oral history interview is really much more relaxed than, say, a journalistic interview. It is not a journalistic interview in which the journalist is looking for expert opinion or driving the interview in an attempt to find some good quotes for his or her article. It is really a relaxed conversation in which interviewer and interviewee are collaborating, are trying to discover the right way to tell the interviewee's story.

It's important to start the interview with a clear understanding and to make it clear who you are and what you are doing there and what will happen (will the interviewee be given

a copy, for example); to be relaxed and to encourage the person you are interviewing to be relaxed.

I am interested in hearing from the interviewee and much less in hearing myself talk. I do all my talking before I turn on the recorder. I explain the purpose of the interview, I explain who will be hearing it, and I encourage the interviewee to be candid (if there's something you want to delete from the record in the end we can do that afterwards) I say something to the effect of: this is your story. To some people I have said, "Think of your life as a movie, it might help; if I were making a movie about your life, what are some of the major scenes that would be in that movie, who are some of the important characters?" To others I might say, "This is the kind of interview you've been giving all your life, and you've been hearing all your life. You've answered these questions before. These are the stories that people tell at home, around the kitchen table, on the telephone, on the city stoop."

I go to great lengths to explain these things because I find, one, that most people feel that they are not qualified to give an interview, since they are so used to the interviewer asking for expert opinion and two, they will try to model themselves after the worst—from an oral history point of view—kinds of television interviews. They will try to take themselves out of the interview, they will try to take their opinions and their feelings out, they'll try to be factual, to give objective accounting because of our society's bias toward the objective interview and its bias in favor of the written over the spoken word. They need to be reminded that this is something they already know how to do, this is talk, and this is talking about life, talking about how we are affected by what's happening around us.

Oral history is a modest endeavor. Yet for the schoolroom and in general it offers a world of possibilities because it asks us to imagine the world.

And in this world of nobodies and somebodies, of violent history, enormous distances, menacing international possibilities, it can make the impossible seem possible if only on a small scale. It reminds us of the reasonable demands of the world, it reminds us of the need to account for the facts, tough as they might be.

Mini Lessons to Introduce Oral History

You can use several of these together in one or more periods to start an oral history project with your class, or you can use them throughout your project as they fit in. All of the times are minimums; the lessons can be expanded.

1. *15-20 minutes*
   Goals:
   - Get students interested in oral history
   - Introduce class to concept and process of oral history

   Play or hand out an excerpt or two of dynamic oral history interviews as **concrete examples**. For example, we played a videotaped oral history interview with a former gang member. The best way to do this is with video, because it holds students' attention more than audio. You may ask them to respond in a journal for a few minutes or go right to a class discussion: What do they notice about the interview? They may notice that it's personal, specific, detailed, emotional, recorded, interesting…. You can also begin to **introduce the art of questioning** (closed, open, follow-up…) in this lesson by asking what else they would want to know about the stories you shared. How would they ask?

2. *10-15 minutes*
   Goals:
   - Activate prior knowledge of oral history
   - Introduce class to concept and process of oral history

   Record this discussion on butcher paper and keep the work posted in class throughout the unit, so that you can refer to or add to it. Ask the students: **What do you think oral history is? What is oral? What is history?** How is oral history different from "regular" or textbook history? How does oral history contribute to these kinds of standard histories? Where have you heard oral histories? (from grandparents, at the dinner table, in a documentary, from parents, in the barber shop, on the corner…)

3. *15-20 minutes*
   Goals:
   - Define oral history in relation to other kinds of interviews
   - Model oral history interviewing

   How is an oral history interview different from other kinds of interviews? One thing we did with students early on was to define the oral history interview in relation to other kinds of interviews. First, we would ask students what they thought of when they heard the word "interview." Basically what they told us was that they thought of the celebrity interview, usually done by MTV. We asked for examples. We talked about different kinds of interviews: the social services interview, the police interview with a suspect, the immigration interview, etc. We had three pairs of students come up to the front of the room and as though they were putting on a play demonstrate each type of interview. This was the occasion for some humor and there was also something playful about it (especially when one teacher pretended to be Michael

Jackson being interviewed by the class). You can have the students play all of the roles, but you play the oral historian.

4. *15 minutes*
   Goal:
   - Familiarize students with the oral history process

   Ask: **How do you think historians, and students, "do" oral history?** (basically the same way) How do you think the interview excerpts you've seen were created? Go over the process briefly, explaining that you will go into more depth later in the project:
   - background research
   - the interview (length, location, types of questions that make a good oral history – review briefly from earlier discussions)
   - transcribing (Share an example of a transcript, allowing students to read along while playing the audio, if possible. Briefly discuss anything they notice about it, such as that it includes questions, is verbatim, has light editing…)
   - dissemination (archiving, publishing, using as a basis for a video or radio documentary, play, or art work…)

5. *10-15 minutes*
   Goal:
   - Introduce class to oral history unit, begin to gather ideas

   What will our oral history project be like? You may have already made many of the decisions about topic, structure, and final product, but try to let students structure the project as much as possible. They may not have many ideas at this point, but just see what comes up, either for themes or interviewees. What kinds of final products can they envision? This is a good time to go over the general course the project will take: how long will it be, what will they be doing, how will they be evaluated…

6. *30 minutes*
   Goals:
   - Teach basic equipment skills
   - Get students excited about oral history

   Equipment training: Pass out equipment. Ideally you would have enough for each pair of students to get one recording kit, but of course you may work in small groups or, if you only have one set, even have volunteers demonstrate the use of the equipment to the class. Walk them through labeling and loading the blank disc, hooking up microphones and headphones, checking batteries, recording, stopping, playing back, and adjusting volume. Have them listen for quality issues such as tapping on the microphone, explosive ps (when the microphone is too close to the mouth, the letter p makes an unpleasant popping noise), background noise, and clarity of speech as they play back their recordings.

Suggested Homework to Introduce Oral History: Collect a real life story from someone you know. You do not have to record it and it does not have to be an extended interview. Either write it down or write about it and your experience collecting it. Be

prepared to share it in class. In the next class you can have students share their stories and use them as the raw material to begin exploring interviewing techniques. "How did you get your story? What were the challenges? What else do we want to know about Kim's father's story? *How would we find out?*"

Helpful Hints for Oral History Interviewing

Amy Starecheski

Why use the biographical approach?
In oral history we pretty much always start at the beginning. If we are interviewing someone about, for example, their experiences of 9/11, we would not start by saying, "Where were you on September 11th?" We would start out by asking about their early life so that the story of September 11th would be contextualized and so that future readers of the interview would have a sense of the person behind the story. Oral historians tend to be interested in subjectivity, in how people make meaning and make stories out of their experiences. Asking, as much as possible, for a full, well-rounded, multi-layered life story helps us to bring the interviewee's subjectivity into the interview. We need to know what experiences, ideas, and people created the interviewee's unique point of view.

Start your interview by stating your name, the name of the interviewee, the date and place of the interview, and the project for which it is being conducted.

I always open with the same question: "Tell me your name, where and when you were born, and a little bit about your childhood." Because this is so open, it gives me the chance to see where the interviewee wants to take the conversation, how open/closed they are initially, and what they privilege in their story. I like to let them create the narrative of their life in their own individual way, and see myself as a guide or helper in this process. I try to assume that there are all kinds of things in the interviewee's life that they could tell me that I will never think to ask about, and to create open space in which *they* can introduce topics.

I like to **start questions with the following phrases**:
- Describe
- Tell me about
- Tell me a story about

Ex: Describe a place where you lived as a child that you remember vividly. Or, Describe your first home. (to follow up) What did it smell/sound/look/feel like? Tell me a story about it. When teaching interviewing for the English classroom, I like to draw students' attention to the fact that the kinds of sensory details that make a good interview also make **a good piece of writing**, and that if they are going to write about an interview they need to try to help the interviewee to give as many vivid details as possible. Likewise, the same skills a reader uses (asking questions, looking for/filling in missing information, asking questions…) to engage with their reading are useful to the interviewer.

Here are some sample **childhood questions**:
- What is your earliest childhood memory?
- Who took care of you? Describe/Tell me about/Tell me a story about that person.
- Who lived with you? Describe/Tell me about/Tell me a story about them.
- Tell me about your schools. Teachers?

- Was your family religious? Political? How? Why?
- What were you good at? Afraid of?

Follow-up questions are the heart of an oral history interview. An oral history interviewer will think a lot about questions they could ask in an interview and will have a clear idea of the themes they want to cover, but they never read through a list of questions when they conduct an interview. We listen and ask follow up questions with an idea of where we want the interview to go but also with flexibility about how we get there. Even a question that changes the subject can be a follow up question. For example, if I'm interviewing someone who's told me that their mother was a university professor, and I think we've talked enough about that person's teen years, and want to move on to college, I might wait for a natural breaking point and say, "I remember you said your mother was a university professor. What did she expect for your future after you finished high school?" *I am interested in the interviewee's attitudes towards education, and her family's attitudes towards education, but rather than asking directly about it, I frame the question using the biographical information the interviewee has already given me.* Follow up questions show you're listening. They help the interviewee to trust you, and they should help to make the interview a coherent whole within which meaning is built up as the interview continues, rather than a series of unconnected anecdotes or facts.

Closed questions—questions that can be answered in a one word—are atypical in an oral history context. They are useful to elicit specific details that will give you a specific context for the interviewee's story and can help to jog the interviewee's memory. Some examples:

- How old were you at the time?
- What was name of the town?

I like to ask people to describe **important** (this could be positive or negative), **or typical days**, from start to finish.

- What was a typical day like when you were 5, 10, and 15…?
- Tell me the story of the day your child was born.
- the story of the day you dropped out of school.
- the story of the day you met your girlfriend.
- the story of your first day teaching.
- You could say, "You said you lived in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn with your grandparents when you were ten. What was a typical day like for you then?"

I also like to ask about what kinds of **choices** people thought they had at different points in their life, and how they made their decisions, or how the decisions seemed to be made for them. *This often works as a way to get at the interviewee's world view and thought processes.* For example:

- When you were finishing high school what options did you consider for where to go from there?
- How did you decide to go to college/to go to a specific college/to get a job/to travel?
- What influenced your decision?
- What factors did you take into consideration?

This works for choosing a career, changing jobs, moving, having kids...

Also, “Why?” “Tell me more.” “And the what happened?” or a simple **open silence** often works to draw the person out. One big difference between an oral history interview and other kinds of interviews is the **pacing**. An oral history interview proceeds at a leisurely pace and has time in it for reflective silence. In normal conversations we rarely allow silences longer than a few seconds, and it will likely feel awkward to allow silences, but they can be important opportunities for the interviewee to think during the interview, to engage in the process of active meaning-making that we value in an oral history interview.

I always end by asking if there’s anything else the interviewee would like to add.

THE ART OF THE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW, PART 2

Gerry Albarelli

V. AND THEN I REMEMBER

Sometimes in an interview an interviewee will begin to remember all at once, in an extremely long sentence that can stretch in the final transcript two or three pages in length, a sentence held together by many "ands" or "and then" and "and then I remember...and then I remember." And the rhythms of this long sentence, the visible pleasure that the interviewee has in constructing it, tells me that the interview is finally on its own feet. It's as if together we've managed to break through the false wall, that barrier between the past and the present, the wall we put up temporarily in order to make life in the present easier, in order to live life more efficiently and really at all.

When the interviewee is remembering all in a rush the rhythms know where they want to go, some of the direction of the interview has been taken out of your hands. It will ask you for help when it needs your help, when it returns from this heightened state and heightened language to the ground and to ordinary language. Similarly when an interviewee begins to remember in the rhythms of lively speech, when dialogue effortlessly makes its way into the story—and then I said, and she said and I said, Wait a minute and he says—when the dialogue and the tenses shift from past to present, when the interviewee is in the past but using the present tense again the interview, at least for a while, is probably a success. This has been my experience or my observation of my experience.

And when the interview takes a turn for the better—because almost no interview starts out all right; everyone needs time to warm up to the process and the interviewee and interviewer to each other – but when it's showing itself to be a good interview, when I am getting what I want, I let the interviewee know this. (In part because they really are generally eager to please.) "That was great," I might say. "That's exactly the kind of thing I was looking for when I asked you that question." And you might have to say it too because people will ask especially if they're enjoying themselves (as though perhaps they shouldn't be): Is that okay? Is that what you want, really? I remember a firefighter saying to me: You're really interested in this …?

I am interested in the human act of remembering and I respect the human ability to make music, reverie, rhapsody, more subtle forms for which we don't have a name, to create a bridge out of language animated, rhythmic, which we can cross from the present to the past and then back again. I am interested in those rhythms that are more powerful and closer to actual experience, that demand their own kind of punctuation and that are much more generous and accurate than those words strung together that fit in the confined and confining spaces determined by ordinary conversation and standard punctuation.

VI. KNOWING THE TIME

It is a good idea to be thoroughly familiar with the time and place of the interviewee's

story. Otherwise you won't be able to help the interviewee to describe it. If you are talking to someone who grew up in the United States in the 1930s, for example, you should know about the Depression, you should know about The Spanish Civil War and the Americans who volunteered to fight in it; you should know what was playing on the radio; which books were being read; the Saturday Evening Post. You should know about the language people used at that time in that place so that you can recognize it when you hear it.

VII. QUESTIONS

Many of your questions, those you prepare in advance (and may never have the chance to ask) will come out of that research. But many of your questions will be follow-up questions, questions in which you are asking to hear more. You should always go to an interview prepared with a list of informed questions and be willing to discard all those questions once the interview, hypothetical until that moment, makes clear where it wants to go, which direction it wants to take.

Some of your questions will be based on your observations of the interviewee, on your observations of the interviewee's surroundings, on your ability to read the interviewee's eyes and voice. Where is there a fold in the story behind which something is hidden? Where is the interviewee dropping a hint—this happens all the time—it's there if you want it, ask me if you're interested.

Keep the questions simple. Never more than one at a time. People who are new or who are made suddenly uncomfortable will sometimes try to rescue themselves by throwing out two or three questions, as if offering the interviewee choices, if you don't like this we have that if you don't like that we have still another. The interviewee, always eager to please, will set off simultaneously in as many mental directions as your questions suggest and will come back with an offering of partial or highly unsatisfactory answers to your questions.

VIII. GHOSTS AND LOCKED DOORS

The life history interview begins in childhood. It begins in the old house, some old house, filled with living presences that are no longer there. It's the job of the interviewee to go back to that old house, to find out how that old house was built, how many lives intersected there, how many important stories were told there. It's the job of the interviewer to reenter that house, the abandoned house, with the interviewee. Your job is to walk through that place paying attention, sensing what's around the corner, looking even as the place is being described to you.

You are trying to make that return visit to the house of childhood easier and even possible; to shine a light in corners of the room where the interviewee might not think to look. You enter the house together. It's your job to say to yourself who you are seeing and then to communicate, in the form of a question, what you are not, what's missing from the story. If you can't get your bearings say so in the form of a question. If the

house is unclear, if in order to understand the story you need a better sense of the place, you need to see hassocks and the silverware drawer, the hutch with family photos, that room at the back with its door always closed. Why is it closed? What is the trouble in that room? Is it a sick relative? Something else?

So your job is to enter the abandoned house, looking around, and then to ask clear, concise questions, questions that are highly insightful and informed. Your job is to sense where the drama and sometimes even the violence took place in that house, behind which doors, and then to go ahead and open those doors (or make a decision not to).

And you must find the ghosts, those people, long gone, who are important to the interviewee's story. Draw on your own experience. What do you know about ghosts? We are all familiar with ghosts, in a sense we never go anywhere without them—those people living or dead who hover about a story, one's story, who are essential and who for one reason or another are no longer around. They are the background, the foundation.

In the oral history interview there are many ghosts. Some are ghosts like those of European extraction who have brought Europe with them in their clothing held together by safety pins; in their pockets, in their habits of speech and religion; others have traveled even greater distances and think about their histories not in terms of a peasant generation or two but stretching back over many centuries. "Where do you want me to begin?" asked the Pakistani I was interviewing. "I'd like to start with my family at the beginning—six hundred years ago." Wherever they are from these ghosts bring with them stories of the world, stories of wars, revolutions, displacements, colonial rulers and then life after the colonial power left for good.

Every interview with an individual is or should be about more than that individual; it should be crowded with interesting presences; it should be about the interaction, the words spoken, the things left unsaid, the people who are essential who bring with them their ghostly histories, sometimes hundreds of years of history, and who are also the foundation of this story. It is your job, even though your interviewee will probably tell you who these people are, to bring them into the story, to make room for them, to let them hover around in it, kibitz at the table, open the newspaper at the end of the day, hang out on street corners, put food away, hire and fire people, turn one's life upside down, throw one out on the street, come to the rescue, commit terrible acts of betrayal, of cruelty, of generosity and kindness.

Edited Sample Interview with Jay Swithers:

Swithers: Hi, my name is Captain Swithers. Testing one, two, three.

[Laughter]

Gerry: Who wants to ask the first question? You do? Okay. All right, meanwhile, raise your hand for the first question. Let's try to remember what we were talking about last week about the type of question that we want to ask. Let's try to keep that in mind, please. That first question is kind of easy.

Student: Where were you born?

Swithers: I was born in Brooklyn, New York, in the Methodist Hospital on September 11, 1961.

Student: Two kids in this school have the same birthday.

Swithers: Really? It's a unique birthday.

Gerry: Okay. Next question.

Student: What are your interests?

Swithers: I do a lot of work and believe it or not, I have a family. I have four children. I have a wife. They are my primary interest now. Growing up, I had other interests rather than just working and having a family—used to like cars and just that type of things.

Gerry: Okay, remember we want to stay in an event and know a little about his background more before he gets to the really dramatic and exciting part, so what do you think would be a good question to fill in?

Student: You could probably ask about his parents?

Gerry: Yes.

Student: Like, your parents—did they influence you to become an ambulance driver?

Swithers: Probably not, both of my parents are dead. My parents died pretty young in life. When I say young, 59 and 67. My father worked for Pan American and as a little boy—you know, Pan American was an airline, actually you guys might not even know about it. It was a major airline back in, in the ’60s, ’70s, and ‘80s. And I wanted to be just like my father, my father worked just for handling cargo. He could tell you, if he was alive he could tell you some really exciting stories. My mother was a housewife and my mother was, had some problematic medical problems. She was a little bit of an alcoholic, so it wasn't always very, very happy. Overall, having to have to be in that

scenario as, being a young kid—being fourteen years old or twelve years old, or ten years old, and having to come home from school and having, a parent who was—drinking. You learn a lot and you become respectful of—of this type of work.

Gerry: Okay. Good follow-up question, because he told you something personal and major and I, I mean there are probably stories and themes implicit in what he just told you. Who wants to ask another question to follow up on what he just told you?

Student: Do you remember—like—one of the stories that your father told you?

Swithers: Yes, I do, I do remember now. I was always very amused by what he did. He used to, at the airport, he would take unique things off the planes and on a lot of occasions there were animals, and I remember, I'll never forget it, a story that he told me where a 747 was shipping a plane full of monkeys into this country. When I say a plane full, maybe it could've been ten, but I just envisioned— One monkey got out and then they let each other out and when the plane landed on the runway as my father approached the plane with a little van he saw all these faces there in the windows and he—you know, "What is this?" It wound up that it was monkeys.

Gerry: That was good, a monkey story. What about what—what he told you about his mother? Anybody else want to ask a follow-up question?

Student: Okay, you know when you said that you sort of had like a respect for, like the EMT, [Emergency Medical Technician] is that sort of what influenced you to go into the job?

Swithers: Okay, could you just repeat that? I'm sorry.

Student: You had said something about why, like your mother drinking, that you sort of had like a respect, so has that influenced your job?

Swithers: Absolutely. Yes, absolutely, yes, absolutely. If you know a little about how alcohol affects people—they fall down, they go boom, they get cut up, you know you have your routine as a kid where you come across a lot of blood and having to call 911. Having them or whoever would come, and I'd be like, "Wow, these guys really have their act together", as if they do this everyday and I was very impressed.

Student: You said your mother was an alcoholic? Did you ever bring any of your friends to your house with you after school?

Swithers: There were periods of time when things seemed somewhat normal and during those times I had brought friends home. However, there were times where unexpectedly—you come home, you ring the doorbell or—I had the key and I lived in an apartment building like the third floor of the apartment building where you open up the door into the kitchen, you know, I would have to ask a friend to wait outside and then say, "I'm sorry, you have to go home."

Student: Were there times, like, when you were ashamed of your mother?

Swithers: Oh, absolutely.

Gerry: These are very good questions, but let's try to put it in a way that will get a story. So, like, "Tell me one time that—", I'm going to ask—we're asking together, "One time that really stands out in your memory, Jay, and you were disturbed, etc., or ashamed—"

Swithers: Well, one time that really stood out in memory is when I became a little bit older and had a job, my mother would make phone calls when she'd drink. One time I was working for a printing company in Jersey. Now I was pretty proud of my job, I was a cameraman there and I was the youngest apprentice at that location. She'd make a phone call of like, some sort of nonsense and then like the people at work who'd be answering the phone call made fun of her, as something that was hilarious, like if you had talked to a homeless person on the street, like how much fun you could make of that person. I remember being very hurt.

Student: And were there times that you felt that your friends were saying things about your situation behind your back? When you told them to leave the house, do you think that they were —

Swithers: —oh, absolutely, yes, yes. And they would go home and say, "Guess what happened, I went over to Swithers' house yesterday, and —"

Student: —his mom was really drunk.

Swithers: Yes.

Gerry: You told me a story about working in a pizza parlor as a teenager—could you tell them that story?

Swithers: When I was seventeen years old, I just had graduated from high school and I had a driver's license and I worked in a pizzeria My background, I'm kind of like a mix, a mutt. I'm a little bit Irish, I'm a little bit of this, a little bit of that. But in the pizzeria, I was kind of the guy that was the outcast because they were all Italians and it was very obvious that there was some connection with the Mafia where—even though I was only delivering pizza, every once in a while I would be asked to deliver a strange package to a strange location as well. I get off work at 11 o'clock, they would have like these little restaurants that were closed to the public, they were social clubs and I would be the guy making the coffee. Anybody seen the movie *Goodfellas* where there's a guy where they, would be going back and forth getting coffee and they didn't like the way he was doing it, so they shot him in the foot? That was kind of like me, the nerdy kid that would be getting the coffee, getting the pastries, getting the coffee, getting this, getting cigarettes, getting that, but at the same time I did pretty well making money there.

Gerry: All right, so I think we have enough background. Let's get into his EMS career. Who wants to ask a question?

Swithers: Yes.

Student: When did you decide that EMS work was really for you, or could you tell us a story about a time early on that maybe you saw something or did something that you weren't sure of, that you thought, "Maybe this isn't for me?"

Swithers: Well, I could remember being much younger, and maybe eight years old, and I remember visiting a family member at the hospital and I was too young to go up. At that time, you had to be a certain age to go up to the room. And while I was waiting outside, this guy sort of went to climb up a fence and his ankle got caught on the picket and he kind of dangled there bleeding to death for like a few minutes before anybody helped him. I always remembered that, because I think I—after a little while watching it, I walked to the curb and I threw up. I never forgot that. I never forgot that.

Then there was another time in my training where I was just becoming an EMT and part of being an EMT you had to do rotations in the hospital. You had to observe like maybe one or two tours and there was a little kid, maybe three years old, that had a laceration on his scalp, and I remember it like it was yesterday, where the kid was screaming, the mother was screaming, he was bleeding, and they said okay, they put him down, and they tied him all up, let him scream, and they started putting needles into his wound with lidocaine, so it wouldn't hurt so much when they would be sewing it. What looked like a little laceration to begin with, it became—they started to take a needle and thread and sew from one side to another and pull, kind of like a little more blood would ooze out. Just watching it for maybe like fifteen minutes, I started to—you know I'm watching the kid scream, I'm watching him only making it worse, while making it better, I started to second guess whether or not I could actually watch it—deal with this blood and guts if I could barely deal with a little laceration that was maybe an inch and a half long.

Gerry: So that was a good question. Let's ask him another good question about his early days on the job.

Student: How was your first day as an EMT?

Swithers: Okay, well, upon graduating the academy and having been promised that somebody would pull the right strings and I'd be working either at Coney Island Hospital or—the last day, all the boys from Bay Ridge were sent to Harlem. It was kind of like culture shock. That first day we went to Harlem there was three of us that were in the car that were white and one Hispanic guy. When we got there, we went inside, and they said Captain Bechtam was inside. Captain Bechtam was a black captain, EMS, respected man. I could hear him yelling at somebody from behind the wall, but the door was open. They had decided that I would be the spokesman for this group. Being very nervous, I walked into the office, I told him who I was and that we're the new students that are assigned here. His response was, "Are their asses black or white?" I said, "Well, we got

three white asses and one Hispanic ass." He said, "Well, this is a bad place to be, so we'll get their asses in here."

Student: You said you grew up in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, so how did you feel going from Bay Ridge to Harlem? You said it was a culture shock. How big a culture shock was it?

Swithers: It was a major culture shock. It was a major culture shock —

Gerry: Tell us a story. Tell us a story about working in Harlem.

Swithers: There was a night that we were working in Harlem, on Lenox Avenue, probably about 128th Street or so, right in the heart of where everything is happening. We got a call for an intox on the street, an intoxicated person, which we do a lot. The person woke up and he said, "Oh, I don't want to be bothered." With that, as my partner and I on the street, we're having the person refuse medical aid, doing the paper work. You could hear pops, pop-pop-pop-pop.

Standing on the corner, it's dark, maybe eleven o'clock at night. A group of people were running the opposite direction. One of the females had come up to me and she grabbed my arm, and she said, "If you want to save a life, you go that way." But I was thinking, like everybody else is going that way, and I can still hear the repercussions of, like the shots, like that's a bad thing. In any event, I picked up my bag and my equipment and said okay, to my partner, "You take the ambulance." Because the streets are all one way streets, and you have to go around, "I'll meet you around the corner."

So I went around by myself, as people were still running the opposite direction. Here comes the white guy from Bay Ridge with a bag running through it. There was a brownstone house with a fence that divided the steps and the sidewalk. In that little area there was a guy with a gun, and another guy lying on the ground bleeding from all different spots. He was still taking shots at this other man on the ground. When I had come up, he looked at me and I looked at him and I said, "Stop!" It seemed as if he was satisfied at that point. When I got down on my knees and started to do an assessment of this guy, I realized that he was barely breathing, if not not breathing at all. He had already been shot in the head. His pupils were fixed and dilated, which usually means probably no brain activity. But, nevertheless, I pulled out my bag-valve mask, which is a bag that you can squeeze, and you put the mask on the patient's face, and you try to ventilate the patient. I started to do what I was supposed to be doing and the guy kind of was still standing there, and he said, "Stop!" I kind of like jumped up and he continued to shoot. He actually shot the bag, shot the guy again in the head, and then asked me, "Is he going to die?" I said, "Yes. He's going to die."

At the same point the sirens from the ambulance, or if not, from the police cars, were coming around the corner and he knew he had to leave, so he ran. I got down on my knees, almost in shock, you know, like I've never seen anything like this in my whole life. Actually, I'd seen a couple of people shot during the six months I was there, but never seen somebody shooting somebody, and watching somebody taking a bullet in the

brain. I could actually remember one of the bullets between the skull and the skin—I started to ventilate this person with the bag that had holes in it, so when you're squeezing the bag, it "phew-phew".

Back-up had come and it was a unit that was familiar with Harlem, they were comfortable with the scene. They jumped from the ambulance and pushed me aside, and said, "That bag doesn't work." I remember bringing this man to the hospital and we brought him to Harlem Hospital, which is the trauma center, where he eventually was going to die. He was pretty much brain dead. I can actually remember thinking like how horrible this can be, like my bag has a hole through and through where the bullet went out, in and out. The EMT on the other ambulance is on the phone with the dispatcher, she's telling him, "Shit, that ambulance they don't even have good equipment. You should see their bag valve mask."

Student: Do you have any stories regarding September 11th?

Gerry: I would say, "Tell me the story of—tell me about that day—take me through that day."

Student: So walk me through the day of September 11th.

Swithers: Okay, on September 11th, 2001, I was forty years old. Yes, it's my birthday. Just days before, my wife had a big birthday party, I got lots of presents, I was really excited. On September 11th, I came into work early in the morning. I work in Brooklyn, right at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge, sort of—had some doughnuts and coffee in the office. It was just a regular day working in the medical office.

Having been on the Urban Search and Rescue team, I carry a beeper. I got the page that a plane had hit the World Trade Center. At first the rumor was that it was a small plane. But, nevertheless, I got the page. I wear a different uniform when I have to go on these Urban Search and Rescue calls. I have to wear boots. I have a different type of pair of pants, a different shirt, and a different jacket. I have bunker gear, respiratory equipment and other things that I carry. It takes me a few minutes to get ready. Taking that few minutes that it takes to get ready allowed the whole entire medical office to leave the building and jump into every vehicle possible to get to the World Trade Center. I was left without any transportation. Having figured out that I have no transportation at all, I took it upon myself to carry the big bag with the bunker gear down to the Brooklyn Bridge, and I had planned to run over the bridge with the equipment. At that time, I was in a little bit better shape and I was running over the bridge almost every other day early in the morning before work. So I knew that I could do it.

When I got to the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge, I was stopped by a police officer who said, "Stop! I can't let you do this." I said, "No, no, you don't understand." And she goes, "No, no, I do understand, but I can't let you run over the Brooklyn Bridge. Just stand out in the traffic and somebody will stop." At that point, there was nobody going into the city on the three lanes of traffic. A black Crown Victoria came spinning around

the corner. A man got out, started to scream at the traffic. He was wearing a suit. I don't even know what agency he was from, but he had little red lights on the dashboard, he had little red lights on the grill. He told me to get in. I threw my stuff on my lap and jumped into the car. He drove over the bridge, which had no traffic, at speeds of like a hundred and fifty miles an hour, I thought I was going to die on the bridge. As we were coming over to the other end, there were people, that were looking, on the bridge, jumping onto the divider. He was actually yelling at them on his PA, "Get out of the way. Get out of the way." And as we came down to the foot of Chambers Street, there were people that were running out of Manhattan on the street, and he was actually yelling on his PA, on his radio, "Get out of the way, I have a fucking paramedic on board." And I kind of thought, you know, "I'm just a paramedic, you know, I'm not going to save the world." At the same time, I was looking up at the building and seeing that it was burning out of control, the other plane had already hit the building prior to me leaving, so both buildings were burning out of control.

As we drove down across Chambers Street, we hit Church Street, this maniac driving dropped me off, and he said, "Is this good enough?" I had to say it had to be good enough. When I got out, I was looking for the main rescue people that I've worked with. Chief Downey was the Chief of Special Operations Command. I asked people, "Where's Chief Downey? Where's SOC?"—what they call Special Operations Command. But at the same time I realized that I was standing in front of a place where they needed a little bit of help.

Out in front of the Millennium Hotel right across from the World Trade Center, the people were just moving back a triage area where they had a lot of patients. There were patients that were burned there, patients that were unconscious, they were bleeding. I kind of looked at my watch and I knew that it was going to be a long day and felt that I could spend a little bit of time helping that group of people. While it was chaos, it was controlled chaos. Triage tags were being placed on patients, we were trying to transport the ones that were more critical. I wound up spending a little bit of time with this woman who claimed that she had asthma. She was a heavyset black woman. She was hysterical crying. I got my stethoscope, I listened to her lungs, and I told her she wasn't having an asthma attack, that she was hyperventilating and she needed to calm down.

Somebody from the Millennium Hotel had brought out some of their nicer chairs rather than having the people sit on the planter outside, the cement planters that are designed to protect the building. Some people were actually bringing out bottles of what looked like alcohol, like drinking alcohol, you know whisky and—which they were filling with water to bring out to these people that were suffering outside. It was a beautiful day, eighty degrees out, perfect temperature, the skies were blue. There was some stuff falling from the building, but they were far enough away that it wasn't a major concern. While I was treating this woman, I reached to get her some oxygen, and while I was turning the oxygen, I could hear the building starting to fall. I didn't know that building was falling, I just heard the rumbling. While I took a look up, I actually didn't see what people saw, the initial reports of the building like peeling apart, but I can understand that they were saying the floors were collapsing within each other. It was blasting out. The female that I

was treating, who was sitting on a planter, I looked down for her and she had left. People were running. I had enough time to only just get so far where I had to make a decision. As pieces of iron were falling left and right, I ducked under a vehicle.

When I ducked under the vehicle, I could hear a loud roar in my ear which pretty much left me a little bit hard of hearing to this date. I couldn't breathe. Everything became very, very dark. I was trying to just take a breath. I was thinking of my children—my son at the time being an infant, that he would never remember me, I'm going to die here. I was absolutely sure I was going to die there. I had no clue what was going on. I kind of thought at that point maybe a missile had just hit where we were standing and overcome us and we were about to die. I really didn't know who I was with. I thought I was probably by myself. At that point I didn't know where I was. My thinking was, I should have stayed in the office. Never leave the office. Stay in the office. Don't ever do this again, you're too old for it. With that, I had the opportunity to take whatever breaths I could. I had a helmet with a hood that I was pulling up and down, trying to figure out what would be the best scenario.

When it all ended, I could feel something pulling on my helmet. I didn't know what it was. I realized it was a civilian who said, "There's a firefighter down here. He'll get us out." I said, "Wow, I'm not by myself. But I'm not a firefighter. I'm not in any shape to get anybody out." I said to the people that were there, "First of all, am I blind or is it black?" Somebody said, "It's black." At that point, I said, "Good, I'm not blind." Because it was black, there was no light at all. You could hear the alarms coming from firefighters' uniforms that they pull if they get in trouble. You could hear silence beyond that, whereas before that there was chaos. Now it was just the alarms from firefighters' uniforms and silence, as if it was the end of the world. I told the people that were there that we should figure out how many people we are and start counting. As they started to count, and they counted like one, two, I was prepared to count three, and somebody else counted three, somebody else counted four, they counted up to like nine, and I said, "Geez, there's a lot of people with me." I had nothing to do with getting these people out. They figured it out on their own. They got up, they ran. They went down the street.

The street was probably ankle to knee high in debris. I got up to a point where there was one of our EMS Suburban's, our fire department Suburban's with the lights running and the doors locked, a police officer took his gun and he was banging against the window. I told him to stop.

I got a little further and there were people trying to get into a bank for safety. I met up with another one of our lieutenants who got on the air and I told him, I said, "Send buses." He was confused by my request. I said, "This is—we need to get those people out of there." There was another man, he was unconscious, he was put in a wheelbarrow that probably came from a construction site, and people were wheeling him back and forth. I was dragged down to a subway station where there was a bunch of people, I remember they were in the fetal position. They said, "What do we do, what do we do?" I looked at them, I said, "Well, stay here. Just stay here. You'll be safe here."

By the time I got upstairs, an ambulance had pulled up. I knew the ambulance was not in the collapse, that the ambulance was from the outside, because it was not covered with debris. Two EMTs got out, and they were in shock. I remember them, they were young. They opened up the doors and the people ran for that ambulance. It was horrible. There were too many people to get into the ambulance. By the time we were done, the man that was in the wheelbarrow was in the ambulance, a few other people were squeezed in, and the next thing I knew was that the woman I had been treating earlier, the heavyset asthmatic woman, she was at my knees. I insisted that if anybody was going to get in that ambulance, she would. As she climbed onto the diamond plate, what the bumper of the ambulance would be—it's very, very sharp, you know, so there's traction—her knees started to hurt her and she started to wail and scream in pain. I explained to her that I didn't have the strength to get her in. I was able to lift one leg up to the next part of the ambulance, and the next leg up to the next part of the ambulance, and there was no room. The people inside were insisting there was "No room, no room." I actually had her big buttocks in my face. I was just able to give it a push and her high heel fell in and she fell onto the floor, and I heard people scream, because she was probably crushing them. I was able to just push the doors closed and wave the ambulance away. It took off and so that group of people escaped the next collapse, which was only a block away. That group of people, they got away.

But the moment they started to drive away, the second building started to collapse. I was able to run down Ann Street and there was a group of people, that were standing in a garage, that signaled me to come in and help them. As we started to push down on the door, the door actually started to go up and debris started to come into the building. I rode the door up and I lost control. I couldn't see again. I let go and I fell down on my face. I thought I was unconscious for a second, but I wasn't. Somebody grabbed me and dragged me into safety. I wound up in a Duane Reade drugstore at that point, where people—they were in shock. They were running for the water. It was almost as if every bottle of water possible became something that was so precious that people were pushing each other out of the way. A security guard said, "Stop!" The people were kind of like stopped, because they didn't know what to do. A police officer actually took out his gun and said, "No, let them go." You know, this is like the Okay Corral right here in downtown New York.

I got on my cell phone at one point, I had spoken to my wife, who was hysterical. I didn't know what happened. My wife told me, "They're gone." I said, "The kids are gone?" She said, "No, the buildings are gone. I'm watching it on TV—" I said, "They can't be gone. It's impossible. I'm one block away." She said, "No, they are gone." Then I started putting two and two together.

I walked around the store collecting stuff off the shelves to make bags to give to people, to help people, because I knew this had been a much greater event than I could ever conceive possible. I actually had the little backpacks like kids would carry to school. I collected them off the shelves, I was putting like bandages in. I didn't even know what I was putting in them. I'm sure I was putting in batteries without the flashlights, flashlights without the batteries, packages of tampons, and I put them out, and at that

point a police officer took the door and said, "Nobody is leaving." There were broken windows, and the people were like, "No, we have to get out of here. We have to get out of here." I just kind of like watched. The police officer then was told there was a bomb in that building. At that point, he let the people go.

We made a decision to go down to the basement to get out three guys who didn't speak English at all. Three levels down into the basement, there were three men that were playing cards. I tried to tell them, "You need to leave." I was covered with debris, "You need to leave." "No English. No English." I said, "Come, come." One guy said, "No, clock-out four o'clock. Clock out." There was electricity down there and at one point, I said, "You know what, these guys, it's their decision. They're going to stay there." I couldn't get them to leave. A police officer tried to help me, he couldn't get them to leave. We then took to the streets.

Later on, to make the story a little shorter, I was asked to go back. I spent the next three days back at the World Trade Center. I wasn't able to go home. We regrouped with the Urban Search and Rescue Team. That night, I had to go back. It was chaos. Parts of the building were still falling.

Gerry: I'm going to do what I say I never should do, and don't you do, which is interrupt, only because we want to finish this in a few minutes, and he has a very important and long story to tell. Just tell them about the final, the last person you rescued. Okay?

Swithers: At the end of one particular shift, there were a lot of firemen. They were coming down, they were on the debris pile. At one point, we were called—my partner at the time was Chief Carl Tramontana, who is a lot more experienced than I am—we were called to reach out to a patient who was alive. Carl and I had to jump from the beams of the building, we were jumping from one beam to the other with flames and burning metal and horrible gaps that would go down maybe thirty feet. At the same time, there were firefighters along this line, we call it a daisy chain, where you pass one thing to the next person to the next person, that they were actually grabbing our arms, you know, reaching for us all along the way, just in case you missed your footing.

We got up to a point ,where they stopped us, where the flames were actually burning in front of us. My face was really, really hot. They said to stop. The heat was atrocious. I actually—at one point where we were standing we had nowhere to go. They said, "Okay, we'll bring the bodies down to you. There are two. There are two bodies." I said, "Well, one's dead, one's alive." The heat was so great, I actually had to look, and I had said, "Isn't anybody else hot?" People made these faces at me like, "Are you out of your mind?" Maybe, perhaps at that point I was out of my mind, but I was just so uncomfortable. I was stepping back and forth, even wearing boots, because my boot soles were melting. My feet were burning. I was really hot. There was a lot of smoke. I'm not a firefighter, I'm a paramedic. I was totally out of my element.

At that point, there was a tower, part of the tower, the highest point of the tower where there was a staircase that had went up that was collapsing. They had said that you're going to have to climb up there. I was doubting my ability to properly do it at the time. I—even being so exhausted, I didn't think I would be able to do it. They said, "Don't worry, we'll bring the stokes basket down to you." They said that there was a patient on the basket. They passed her down and they started to pass her from one I-beam to the other. By the point that this patient had come past us, we weren't able to do anything for her. She was a female. You could see her hair was singed. Her head was very swollen. My guesses were that she was unconscious and that she was dead, by the basis, by what we had seen. The only thing that I can recall was that there was just a little bit of moisture on her lips. They said, "She's dead."

My partner, Carl, radioed to the guys that were waiting at the other end to let them know that there was another dead patient, another dead person that was being brought out. It was much to our relief that the guys on the other end–and I remember it as if it was yesterday—Lieutenant Gerry Santiago on the other end got on the radio and said, "Carl, Carl, this one's alive!" Just as they got her almost into the body-bag, and were ready to zip her up she woke up. She was able to tell the story that she was on the thirty-third floor. That she had no clue what had happened. She only remembers going to work that day. That was the official last live person that was taken out. This was the afternoon of September 12th.

Gerry: Well, thank you very much.

[APPLAUSE]

Swithers: Thank you.

Chapter Two:
How Does It Look In the Classroom?

This chapter will give you a picture of how oral history might look in your classroom. It opens with an essay, "Beyond the Classroom," exploring oral history as a way to welcome the outside world into your school. Through essays and interviews with teachers, we look at the ways in which oral history fits into English and Social Studies classrooms. You will read descriptions of four sample oral history projects. We have included here a section on partnering with outside organizations, because these partnerships were so essential to our work. The sample interview is with Rosalie Long, an African American woman from the South who insisted on riding in the front of the segregated bus almost two decades before Rosa Parks.

Beyond the Classroom

Gerry Albarelli

According to a certain approach to education, the classroom is a kind of world apart even while at the same time being a microcosm of the world. Students should leave their problems at the door. They should be prepared to sit down, behave and listen to their teacher regardless of the teacher's ability to engage an audience. They should be prepared to learn things they are interested in and things they are not, whether or not the books used by the teacher are any good. The books may not be any good and the students may know this but they're not really entitled to an opinion or those opinions are not taken too seriously.

According to this approach, all the problems that dog students—family problems, economic problems, problems that have to do with the secret thuggish life of schools, the order established by students which adults sometimes have no inkling of, drugs, violence, problems of adolescence, of history—have no place in the classroom. Everyone and everything has been carefully and conveniently compartmentalized: the teacher is over here, the students over there, the lesson here, the world there. Students are expected to buckle down and study since after all what happens in the classroom is only a rehearsal for what will happen once they get out of school. The sooner they accept it and adjust to it, the better.

According to another approach, what happens in the classroom cannot be separated from what happens in the world. Students are not a series of blank slates waiting for the teacher to write on them. They bring their histories with them, both their personal histories and their public histories, which are inevitably intertwined. The more a teacher does to dissolve the classroom walls, the better. The more the teacher does to relate the classroom lesson to the world outside, the better. The more the teacher does to play down his or her own teacher sanctioned authority (and to rest on a certain earned, natural authority), the better. This is of course harder for the teacher to do. It isn't easy to experiment with democracy in the classroom, which is to admit that we are all in this together, that we are all faced with the daunting task of assigning meaning to our lives even as that meaning unfolds around us.

There are many possible ways of trying to go beyond this compartmentalization of the first approach. One possible way is to bring in people who can tell students firsthand experiences and who can interestingly complicate what both the books and the teacher have to say. This is oral history in the classroom.

But the Telling Lives oral history project that we did in the schools was slightly different in that it consciously sought to break down the barriers on a grander scale—the barriers not only between students and teachers, interviewees and interviewers, but also lessons in the textbooks and lessons being told. And at the same time we took into account a contemporary historic event, September 11th, with its roots in the past and its frightening map of the future, and said, "This cannot be ignored." Which does not mean that we

addressed it directly. It was simply and always in the background—the literal and the figurative or intellectual background of this project.

The attack on the World Trade Center could not be ignored because it occurred just a few blocks south of the schools where the two Telling Lives pilot programs took place. It's not as if these students were not vaguely aware or sometimes even acutely aware of the many ways in which contemporary history insistently intruded upon their lives. It's not as if they were not living lives much more complex than the lessons they were learning in their textbooks or than the adults around them were sometimes capable of recognizing. Their parents after all for the most part were immigrants and did not for the most part speak English. They did not for the most part make a living wage at those factories that were suddenly closing and now they were making nothing at all.

We tried to create a program that would address some of those things that students know but never talk about, that would bring them out into the open. We also wanted a program that would address the way in which history is dealt with in our schools and beyond our schools. History cannot be contained in the textbooks. It's not contained in the past. It seeps into the present. It crashes into your neighborhood. It smoulders a few feet from the school where this experiment—that's what we called it—was taking place.

After hearing Josephine Prins, who at fourteen was shipped to Auschwitz where her job was to fold the clothes of people headed for the gas chambers, one student offered this as a definition of oral history: "Oral history is talking to people who have lived through history. Like I could be interviewed about September 11th because I was there."

They drew the conclusion that if these people they were meeting were interesting because they had witnessed history, then they, that is, the students themselves too they themselves were also interesting—at least potentially interesting to future generations—because they too had lived through history. And history looked at this way was not an iron force slated to obliterate them. It was something they had a part in describing, therefore something whose meaning they helped to create.

Right from the outset we told the students, and I reminded them of this on a regular basis, that they were conducting these interviews—with garment workers, with survivors of the Cultural Revolution with eyewitnesses to the Communist revolution in China, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, life in the segregated South, the Great Depression—because they were going to make a book, a videotaped documentary film and a multimedia exhibit. I reminded them constantly that oral history was a means toward that end and that the press and their parents would be at the opening. And I encouraged them to try to make something that they would feel proud of. The prospect of the exhibit kept the students interested and excited about what they were doing. And the opening was an exciting event. But what was at least equally interesting to us was the connections the students were drawing, the chance the project gave them to tell their own stories.

One day about halfway through this sixteen week program a student named Peter told me he wanted to interview himself for his at-home interview. "Because I've had an interesting life."

As his mother's second born child in China he should, according to the law, have been aborted. His mother hid her pregnancy; eventually her own sister-in-law, Peter's aunt, reported her to the authorities and the mother went into hiding. "I had to hide when I was in her belly and when I got out. And here's the sad part:" he said, "And people would ask my mother if I was her son and she's say no and I had to call her auntie." Eventually he landed on the Lower East Side of New York. "You escaped from history," I said. "No one escapes history," he said.

But he understood that history sometimes provides unexpected outcomes, and that one can even be irreverent in the face of it.

I believe that the problem of compartmentalization goes beyond the classroom and the educational system, though it certainly has roots there. It's this same compartmentalization that allows us as a nation to focus on September 11th as a day apart, a day in isolation that occurred—and goes on occurring—in a vacuum. It's this kind of compartmentalization that erases the past and obfuscates the future; that leaves people stunned and with nothing to go on; that robs them of the authority to interpret the world around them, creating a kind of amnesia and a tendency toward frightened obedience.

What better place then to conduct a project on how to record and confront the history of traumatic public events and how to live with them than the neighborhood of the World Trade Center? What better place to try to restore meaning, complexity and depth to an event that has been talked about over and over in our talky age but never explored respectfully and adequately? What better place to rescue that event from the media and politicians who have talked about it as horrible beyond measure and yet who have flattened it and shamelessly turned it toward their own ends? And what better group of people to try to inspire to confront the enormous destructive power of history and to bear witness to the enormous capacity of human beings to resist it than those same students, resident of the neighborhood, who have suffered history directly and who because they are young will inherit the brunt of the post-September 11th world?

Oral History as a Literary Text:
Using this Genre in your English Language Arts Classroom

An oral history, in its oral, transcribed, or edited and published forms, is a rich source for the English classroom. Whether you choose to transcribe your interviews in full or not, you can still work with them as you would any other text, teaching about ways in which a storyteller builds suspense, crafts a surprise ending, or uses literary devices to create meaning. Just like an author, an interviewee makes decisions at every step of the way about how to tell his or her story. The difference is that the interviewee is right there with the students, and available to be questioned about this process. What makes an oral history interview especially engaging and complex is that it can be examined as a text co-authored by the interviewer(s) and the interviewee. How do student questions and nonverbal responses shape the story? How are students helping (or hindering) the interviewee to tell their story?

We have found it useful to make connections between the practices of proficient readers and writers and the skills needed in interviewing. We often have students write from the interviews they do in class (see Activities for Processing the Interview, p. 93), and they quickly see, when trying to imagine a particular scene or story vividly enough to write about it, that they should have asked more specific questions, asked for a story, or tried to bring out sensory details. Through the writing process, they become better interviewers. Knowing that they will be creating something from the text of the interview, students are motivated to create the highest quality primary source they can. Likewise, many of the practices of active reading are also essential to the "active listening" that is one of the central processes of oral history. An interviewer, like a reader, needs to pose questions while they listen, look for missing information, imagine the story, and think critically about what they're hearing. Using oral history is an engaging, authentic way to reinforce these skills.

When students get involved in transcribing, editing, and publishing oral histories, it provides an opportunity grounded in real-world activities for teachers to explore authorial intent, the ethics of publishing, the power and stigma of dialects, ways to make meaning through punctuation, and all kinds of editing skills.

Oral history, as a genre, can be linked to studies of memoir, personal essays, autobiography, interviews, journalism, non-fiction, and research writing.

Many scholars use literary theory as one tool to analyze oral histories. For an excellent example of this, see the work of Alessando Portelli, one of the foremost oral history scholars in the world today.

The Serious Nature of Casual Speech: Oral History and Literature

Gerry Albarelli

Casual speech should be honored in the English classroom even while the English classroom must be in the business of honoring formal English. Casual, spoken speech, with all its originality, its rule-breaking, its irreverent vitality, should be honored alongside the rules that are the intricate and complex foundation of formal standard English. Casual speech is important in the English classroom because it is so important to literature, to the reading of it and the making of it.

In the reading of literature one must pay careful attention and not underestimate the ability of casual speech to say complex and important things in a seemingly simple way. In the making of literature, casual speech plays such an important part because of the importance of dialogue, the dynamic means by which a writer reveals so many things central to the story and to the story's progress.

But there's more to it. Casual speech is the original language. It is our oldest language, the language we know best. It is the language mothers speak to children, lovers speak when they're not busy doing what lovers do, it is the language enemies speak when in fact or in fiction they find themselves face to face. It is the lovely, lively and original speech of place; it is one way in which place, also essential, establishes itself in a story. Casual speech is like the open window letting in the sounds of the street or the dining room table around which noisy relatives say everything important that needs to be said.

There are other good reasons for the English teacher, for the teacher of writing, to encourage the use and the exploration of casual speech. For one thing, students often know so much about it. This means of course that, at least for a little while, the job of the English teacher changes. Rather than point out or remind students of what they don't know, the teacher needs to remind them or point out what they do.

This however doesn't mean that the student doesn't have work to do: casual speech is as demanding as formal speech. It demands absolute originality, precise use, inventiveness, and it demands that the student make surprising discoveries while using it.

Oral history is the telling of serious stories in casual speech. Oral history reminds students what they once knew and what education sometimes helps them to forget: that they have heard many important stories told casually at home and in other casual places; of the many unofficial stories as compelling as the official story; of the human tendency to tuck vital information into stories and then pass those stories around in one way or another; of the human need to give shape to experience. It reminds the student of the variety of shapes a story might take, not just those borrowed or inherited from literature. It offers an alternative to cliche. It reminds students of the fluid nature of storytelling; it gives them an opportunity to watch a person create a story and search for its ending.

Oral history can remind students of their own authority. At the same time, it reminds them of what they don’t know. If you are going to write about a cop and you interview a

cop, you will be reminded of the need to know the language of cops. A person who has been in jail can tell you things you can't imagine about jail. A person who grew up sixty years ago will provide essential information almost without realizing it, including the information contained in his or her speech, which is really the music of another time.

Oral history offers or at least suggests the possibility of multiple perspectives on a single subject or event. (And literature of course makes constant, interesting use of point of view). Oral history can encourage the writer to consider and reconsider the mystery of what, if anything, actually happened.

How does this work in a classroom? Students interview people in the classroom, on class trips and at home. They bring in stories that have been passed down in their own families. They read some of the important literature that began as oral literature. They discuss, cultivate and appreciate the uses of casual speech that they hear in these interviews.

Sometimes students interview someone, a cop, a firefighter, an immigrant, an ex-gang member, and then I ask them to write a story from that person's point of view; or to write a story that is set in another time or place; or to write a story about some historical event; or to write a story that is all dialogue (since all this attention to casual speech is especially aimed at training the ear for dialogue); or to write a story that is thematically connected to the story or stories the interviewee told. You don't want to write about that cop, you didn't find that cop at all interesting, then write about crime and punishment, which is what that cop was talking about, from your point of view. In other words, I give direction to those who want it and leave room for broad interpretation for those who need more freedom to imagine in a direction I can't imagine.

Sometimes oral history interviews can stimulate students by reminding them of their original interest in the world when in the course of interviewing they meet people they might never have met otherwise; or when they are moved to tell stories that might not otherwise be told. Or when they are surprised at the existence of small worlds they hadn't suspected within our larger world.

It isn't only the content but also the process of conducting an oral history interview that can help train and inspire students to recognize the story, to see it as it passes quickly by, and to invent the story out of the recognizable. In order to conduct a good oral history interview, one must develop the habit of careful questioning and the habit of careful observation; one must ask questions that reflect an interest in and insight into the other. Students have to pitch themselves into the consciousness of another. This is what the oral historian does, also the writer.

But this is the point: Find a way to expose students to the life stories of others. Find a way to bring the outside world into the classroom. Remind students often of the connection between literature, the making of it and the writing of it, and life. And remember that everything that literature and oral history have to say to us in inspired casual speech has implications beyond the classroom, beyond the interview and the story.

(A Non-Oral History)[2] Interview with Bryce Bernards

Bryce Bernards is a second year 8th grade English teacher at Dr. Sun Yat Sen Middle School 131, in New York City's Chinatown. He was one of the teachers who worked with us on the Telling Lives Project in 2004 – his class created a book called "Home Free" on the themes of immigration and discrimination. With Taylor Connolly, another English teacher at 131, he applied for and received a $15,000 Champions of Active Learning two year grant to do oral history projects with their eighth graders. He was kind enough to let us interview him about his experiences using oral history in a real classroom situation.

Amy: How do you think going through the Oral History Project last year affected the kids who were in your class?

Bryce: I think they definitely had a sense that they were a part of something bigger, and they were involved in creating something, so it wasn't like they were being fed a bunch of information, but they had the ability to create their own information. And I noticed that with a lot of students, especially who wouldn't normally want to get involved, they would definitely take more **initiative** and were doing more things because they had more control of the product. They were able to take all the information that they had gathered and get all the transcripts back and cut them up and put them together in a way that they thought was artistic or meaningful for the general public, and I thought that was really cool. I remember one of the students said he wrote this song for somebody he had interviewed and it was awesome cause I didn't even tell him to write a song, so in terms of their literacy it was really helpful, it was nice, it was good to see them taking initiative and that was encouraged through the projects. I think one thing that helped them to take initiative was the idea that you're working towards an end project, like an exhibit, that you know that what you're doing is you're creating something that is going to be seen by others.

Amy: As far as really skills-based stuff, really focusing on the eighth grade English tests—and I know that a lot of the students here are second language learners and will probably be considered to be skills-deficient, if you want to use that terminology—do you think that the oral history project **helped them in any of their basic English skills**?

Bryce: Yes, I think it helped them in terms of a couple of things. One will be **listening**, cause they had to listen and they had to use their listening skills to create their own questions, and so they had to come up with their own ideas. And in terms of essay writing or coming up with ideas about what you're reading, if you're reading a book nobody's—you don't have to come up with a new idea about it in order to keep the conversation going, because the book is just giving you stuff and you're just reading it, it's like

[2] This is not an oral history interview because it does not use the biographical approach, is not intended for an archive, and does not take place within a consciously historical framework. If it was an oral history interview, I would have asked Bryce questions about his family, his childhood, how he came to teaching, and his life outside of school. I would have tried to place his oral history work within a broader social, historical, and personal context. The interview was conducted as part of our evaluation of our project. **It is important to note that oral history can be contrasted not only with journalism but with other kinds of qualitative research interviewing.**

watching a movie. But if you're in a class and you've got somebody on stage and you have to keep the interview going, you're really forced to come up with ideas in order to keep the conversation going and hopefully if you have the right structures in place, like we want to ask follow-up questions and whatnot, then they're building on knowledge that they've already gained, which is something that you do as a reader, like, "Okay, now I know this so what does this change about how I think about this, and how can I question this?" It helps with sequencing.

It helps with being able to **structure information** that you're given, because you get all the information and then you have to organize it, and so deciding how we're going to share what we learned from the people we interview is like organizing a paragraph; you put a topic sentence and then you have three proofs, so we can say, "Don Kao is a brave guy." Why is he brave? "Well because he grew up in the segregated south and went into the white people's bathroom even though he wasn't white or black. He is fighting for the rights of homosexuals and also he's fighting for the rights of people with HIV and AIDS, and with all of this he has AIDS too." And without even a lot of coaching. It's just built into the idea that we get this information and we have to present it in a way that is sensible to people who weren't there in the interview room.

Amy: So how do you feel about the **time that the oral history project takes**? I mean I think we ended up doing like eighteen hour and a half long sessions with them last year, and I'm not sure how much time you're devoting to it this year. Was that a challenge for you to find that time with all the other things that an English teacher needs to do or with the constraints of testing and—

Bryce:—no, I don't think it is at all. I mean I think that if you do it right and you know what the kids need to know for the test, then you can build it all into an oral history project, it actually is better than doing other things because you can get in the non-fiction, you can get in the poetry, you can—I mean it's a pretty large umbrella, oral history, you can fit anything underneath it. But I don't see it as a problem whether you do it pre-test, post-test, you can always figure out what the kids need, what they're deficient in, even if it's vocabulary, I mean you could say, "Okay, let's go back into this interview and look at all the words that we don't know, and then figure out what those mean so we can understand it better," or "How is this person putting sentences together? Is this grammatically correct?" You can do grammar lessons even with the oral history.

Amy: What are some of the **challenges of using oral history in the classroom**, both with us last year but even more on your own?

Bryce: I think getting kids engaged sometimes. Cause we have some kids that do like their science fiction and stuff like that and so they don't want to be dealing in non-fiction or they don't want to be interviewing people, or they're shy. You know there are the shy kids who don't want to ask questions, and you don't know really if they're engaged or not, and maybe they are but that's a challenge, figuring out how to get everyone involved. But these are challenges that are just involved in teaching. But specifically to oral history, I guess it will be in learning how to use the equipment, making sure that all the students

know how to use the equipment, I think that is a little bit challenging, making sure they take care of the equipment, that they don't break it, that they bring it back on time. How do you get continued funding in order to maintain the equipment, I think that's going to be the hardest challenge. But in terms of the curriculum, I think that they're really into it, especially the fact that they get to interview their friends and their parents and stuff, and that they have a lot of control.

Amy: Are there any lessons that you taught this year that have been particularly successful?

Bryce: **I taught a follow-up question class**, because the first interview that my class did, it was all over the map. And so one lesson I did was, I said, "Okay, you guys can ask me questions, but they can only be follow-up questions, and if you ask me a follow-up question then you get a certain amount of points and if it's not a follow-up question then you lose this amount of points." And that combined with the fact that they're extremely interested in and curious about my life, because I'm their teacher and they're like, "Oh what does Mr. Bryce do?" so that was effective. I explained what a follow-up question was, and also that the interview has to kind of be in chronological order. We begin in childhood but we don't want it to stay on childhood, we want it to move forward, so sometimes you want to ask a follow-up question that is related to the prior subject, but also moves it forward a couple of years. And so they were able to do that with me and then I found in the next interview that they were able to really transfer that skill into their actual interviewing of people coming in from the outside, so I thought that was cool, a follow-up question lesson.

Also you're going to have to keep harping on the open-ended question lesson because people are always going to ask closed questions, just cause they want the quick answers, they want everything to be quick.

Amy: Are there any particular lessons you can point to that **used oral history in test prep**?

Bryce: Yes. In test prep we did a lesson where we took two of the interviews and we said, "Okay, we've interviewed James Li and we've interviewed James Morales. Now we give an essay question—basically it's for the essay on the test—well first of all tell us about Li's identity and what are the aspects that he gave us about his identity, and what are the aspects of James Morales's identity? And then we asked them to compare and contrast the different identities, where they're similar and where they're different. And that is—for test prep they have to compare and contrast two articles, non-fiction articles and show the similarities and differences and use all that language. So it's actually a string of lessons, not only do we use the oral history as test prep for essay writing but for the skill of comparing and contrasting, for conjunctions, using "however, whereas, on the other hand, like, as well." We also use it to teach character traits for test prep, "What are the character traits of this person?" So those would be the most obvious ones, those are the most overt ways that we use oral history for test prep. Then there are also a lot of more subtle things that happen in terms of test prep, like listening to and transcribing, you

know we have the students transcribe the interviews—parts of the interviews—and on the test they have to transcribe while I read a story. And I'm not telling them, "Oh, this is helping you for the test," but it basically is, and that's the best kind of test prep, where they are doing it and they think it's really important ‘cause they need to transcribe and then they have to use that again.

Amy: Do you have **inclusion classes**? Do you have any students in your classes this year that are labeled as learning disabled or physically disabled?

Bryce: Oh, yes, I have. Yes.

Amy: And how does oral history work in that situation?

Bryce: It works the same, you know? Sometimes I think that the maturity level is a little bit different, so I might take that into consideration. I have kind of extreme things, I have SP [Special Progress, or high performing] kids and then I have the inclusion class. The SP kids are the advanced ones and they can handle things that my general education kids last year wouldn't have been able to handle. But I think it's important for them. I will still put the same people that the SP class interviews in front of the inclusion class, because I think that that's how they learn. I have a student in a wheelchair in that class, so I can't take that class to MoCA [The Museum of Chinese in the Americas], so we have to figure out something else, but in terms of the curriculum I don't really modify it that much. I think it's important for them to do all sorts of the same things. They might not do it on as high of a level, but I still think they can learn just as much.

Amy: Are there any ways in which oral history is particularly useful to or suited for that class?

Bryce: Yes, because I think that getting them alternative modes of learning is really important, because they hadn't really done well in the classic form, where, "Okay, let's take this and let's learn from this. Let's learn from this worksheet, let's learn from—" Obviously that's failed them, and I think that this is kind of a—not a radical departure but it's definitely a departure from the way that they thought about learning before, and they might not even think of this as learning. And they're used to failure. They know that usually when they do things in the classroom they fail, and this gives them the ability to succeed because anybody can ask a question and they actually ask really a lot of good questions that other people wouldn't necessarily think of. So it gives them another forum where they can become successful students, so I think it's actually more crucial for kids with IEPs or inclusion classes or even self-contained classes or whatever, you know?

Amy: What could we have done better last year?

Bryce: I think the one thing that we could have done that would have improved, or the one thing that would improve would have been to have more books—texts that took oral history and put them in a book form. We have that now this year and I know I have students that are really into this 9\11 oral history book. And also they're into this Native

American oral history book, and **I had this one student who was asking advice, "Where can I get more of these oral history books?"** There's one by Studs Terrell they like; it's the World War II one. I think that they like to have more books that they can—not all of them, but some of them want books that they can look at.

Amy: What do you think they like about the oral history books?

Bryce: I think they like the fact that it sounds like somebody's voice, that it's not artificial. I think especially when they're in eighth grade they feel like everything is so—if it's fake it's not cool; if it's not authentic then they don't like it. And I think the good thing about oral history books is that it's just somebody talking and they can read that, cause they're tired of reading flowery poems or memoirs that are overly constructed or fiction books that don't really speak to their lives, you know? I mean even if you read histories of Native Americans, Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee was written by a white person who had interviewed Native Americans but it wasn't from a Native American's point of view, so I think that what they like is actually the authenticity, the fact that they know, "Oh this is real," that there's no in between, there's nothing flowery about it, that it's just—you have all the ums, and ahs and the I don't knows, and the spaces between the words, I think that that's what they really dig.

Q: **How much of a challenge do you think it would be to find interviewees** if you were just doing this on your own without the lists that we built up last year?

Bryce: I don't think it'd be a challenge. I mean personally for me, like I already brought somebody in that wasn't on the list, and we could bring in other people just from the school. And just people who are your friends. I have people coming up to me, my colleagues here at the school saying, "Oh you know what, they should interview my dad, he'd have a lot of really good stories. They should interview this person I know." So it's like once people hear that you're doing the oral history project, everybody wants to talk. I feel like everybody wants to talk about their lives. And also people are wanting to talk to kids. Just talking to my friends about it, and they're thinking, "Oh you're a teacher, it's so worthwhile, I want to come in and talk to your class," and sometimes I have to turn people down because I'm like, "Well, it's not that you're not interesting, but it's like we're looking for a certain kind of person to be interviewed," so I don't think it's a difficulty at all, in fact I actually find myself turning people down.

Amy: Can you speak a little bit to the aspect of oral history that involves mentoring or **seeing interviewees as role models**, and do you think it's useful at all in terms of social development or consciousness of their place in the world, that kind of thing, for students to hear the stories of older people or people who are different than them?

Bryce: Yes, I think that so far the two people I brought in I have been very strategic about it. Okay, I know the story that they're going to tell before they come basically, and so I do think that we're—for example James Morelos, he is a Mexican American, a homosexual, grew up in poverty but learned that you don't need to have money in order to have style—and I think that's something very important for the students here to know about, because

they all think, "Oh, you really have to have money to have style." And James tells all these stories about how he wished he was white when he was a kid because he thought they were the ones that had money or style, and that he learned a lot from his mother. And so I think definitely there is an agenda. You don't want to let—overtake what you're doing, you know cause you'd like to have a little room for play. I don't know if that answers your question or not.

Amy: Yes it does. Do you find yourself needing to do a lot of scaffolding or even filling in the blanks in terms of **historical context**?

Bryce: Well that's what we're—that's part of the goal of the project is that—and I've told this to my 802 class, now you find that we have people coming and I'm getting you the articles about them, I'm getting you the information about them, but what we're moving towards is that I tell you who's coming in, and this is probably going to be like when Josephine Prins comes in, what you're going to have to do is I'm going to just tell you okay she survived the Holocaust and you guys are going to have to research that and you're going to have to come in with the materials and then you're going to have to tell me what you're going to ask her, and so it goes from of course me modeling what happens—oh look I went on the internet and I got this article on James Morelos, or I went to the library and I got this book about segregation in the South, or homelessness. You kind of gradually hand the power over to the students and then hopefully they're doing that. So that's the scaffolding, is part of—is you just take it away, it's like training wheels on a bicycle.

Amy: Have you found that it takes you a lot of **extra time to do oral history** as opposed to doing other kinds of lessons, you know outside of school or weekends and in the evenings and stuff?

Bryce: No. It wouldn't—but yes it would take—it's always going to take extra time because you have to call people and set up interviews and if you have a grant like we do we have to write a bunch of stuff for the grant and show that we're doing stuff, so that takes extra time. And then taking in, checking out equipment, but in terms of the curriculum it's nothing I wouldn't do if I wasn't planning something else, and it's all something I can use in the future.

Amy: Do you think you could do it without a grant?

Bryce: Yes, I think you could. I mean you don't have to have mini-disc recorders, you could just get—maybe the school has tape recorders you could use and dictaphones. You wouldn't have to have the photos and the actual sounds of the people playing, you can definitely do it without a grant, certainly, and then it would just be more lo-fi—which is fine. I mean we actually thought about that when we were doing the grant budget. Fifteen thousand dollars is a lot of money for us, so we are struggling to use it all actually, so **if you do it without a grant**—I think it would be harder though, you'd have to really dig down—I could imagine myself digging down in the basement for old equipment and

stuff. But you would also do fundraisers you know—bake sales—what else? I'm sure we could figure out ways to raise money in order to conduct an oral history project.

Amy: Is there anything else that you would add, any thoughts on oral history in the classroom or any—especially challenges of using it—successes—any success stories you can think of?

Bryce: Well I like the fact that my students, you know a lot of times you give them back something that they've done and they don't hold onto it, they just throw it away, or they're like, "Oh you can keep it." But the stuff that they did in the oral history project they really remember it and they really—they still have the books that they created last year, and they're like, "I still look at that book," and stuff. And they come back to me from high school and they're like, "That was really cool, and I liked doing that," and **it's really memorable for them**. It's something that is going to not just disappear the next day, and that's what I like about it, that's number one. And number two, which is kind of related to number one, is that especially it depends on where your population is, but here in Chinatown, it's so Chinese and everyone is—you know they speak Chinese and they don't know much about other cultures and other things and it's so nice to have them see somebody from Afghanistan where they're, "Oh, they're all terrorists," you know, that's what they think. They literally think that, and then to have them meet somebody who's totally articulate and—not that terrorists aren't articulate—but that's articulate and can speak to them intelligently about these issues is really invaluable because it will help them when they go to their high schools here, which are not going to be mostly Chinese, there's going to be a lot of mixtures and they're going to need to deal with the unknown and things that are different and not be closed off to it and so it helps them on two levels; number one it's memorable and they like it and number two it's really going to open them up to things that they normally wouldn't get to see.

Amy: Are there any **topics that you would really avoid** in an oral history interview?

Bryce: No. I haven't uncovered any. We've dealt with homosexuality, violence—what else—AIDS. And I've seen things that have made me uncomfortable, seen things that my students have done that have made me uncomfortable, the way they've reacted to certain things, but I think that if you prep the interviewee beforehand, and the interviewee knows that they're dealing with 8th graders, then I think it should be fine, because that's the purpose of it is to make the kids uncomfortable, you know? Not the sole purpose but part of it is, "Oh you have to be uncomfortable in order to learn and be comfortable."

Amy: So **how do you prep the interviewees**? What do you say to them before they come in?

Bryce: I tell them usually like just that they're 8th graders and they can—you know if you say certain things that they might laugh at them and it's not because they're—you know - they're just immature a little bit, so you just have to remember that and don't be offended. But if you are offended I understand. I get offended by certain things they say and I just try and be polite with them because they haven't been exposed to a lot of things.

And then I also tell them the theme of the project; we're talking about identity so if you can think of things with identity that you can talk about that would be great. So I want them to go with the theme.

Amy: Well thanks a lot for your time. I know you're really busy right now, and I appreciate it.

Four Sample Classroom Oral History Projects

1. Teacher Kerry McKibbin, at the New York City Lab School, did an oral history project with her 8th graders built around their reading of To Kill a Mockingbird. Kerry writes that she "wanted them to see that the experiences characters lived through and the themes authors wrote about existed very much in the 'real world.'" Each individual student conducted an interview with an adult focused around themes from the book, such as justice, empathy, and innocence. The students then transcribed their interviews and edited them down into two to five page pieces. Working with the Student Press Initiative at Teachers College, the class published their oral history writing in a paperback book: Linking Literature: Using Oral History to Connect Books to the World.

2. Teacher Karen Balliett, at The School for Children at Columbia University, used oral history to help her 6th grade students understand the motifs of love and violence in Romeo and Juliet in new ways. The class worked on oral history for one period a week throughout the trimester. After learning the basics of the oral history method, they interviewed elders about their stories of love and interviewed a former gang member about his experiences of gang violence. They interviewed Josephine Prins, featured on pages xx, about how art and love helped her to survive the violence of the Holocaust. Throughout the unit they were continually collecting stories from home that link to Romeo and Juliet. They went home and asked questions like, "Can you tell me a story about a time love shaped your life?" and "Tell me a story about a time when a parent forbade you to do something, or you as a parent forbade your child to do something." For their final project they worked in teams to create installations to present their vision of how the stories they'd heard intersect.

3. Teacher Dave Iasevoli, at Horizon Academy on Rikers Island, used oral history to help his students, all incarcerated youth ages 18-22, to tell their own stories. The project began as a reading group, where students explored the genre of published oral histories. Dave recorded life history interviews with six of his students, had them transcribed verbatim, and worked with the students, the students' peers, and adult collaborators to help them revise their stories for publication. Their book, Killing the Sky, has been published by the Student Press Initiative at Teachers College.

4. The year after he worked with us to pilot the Telling Lives curriculum, Al Guerriero, did a project called "Why War?" with his eighth grade American History students at Intermediate School 126. As part of their more traditional study of 20th century history, they interviewed veterans of wars from WWII to the Gulf War, women who stayed home while their husbands fought, and anti-war activists to gain a deeper, multi-layered understanding of war.

Oral History as a Primary Source Document in the Social Studies Classroom

by Al Guerierro, 8th grade Social Studies teacher, Intermediate School 126

I have taught social studies for the past five years and have come to realize the importance of including an oral history project as a component to any social studies program. In the winter of 2003 and spring of 2004 my 8th grade students created a documentary, *Chinatown Telling Lives,* and a book, *History: Shadows and Dreams,* based on eyewitness testimony about events in American history. My essential questions for the year were: How did immigrants assimilate into American culture and what were the obstacles they confronted? How did the United States became a global economic, political and social force in the world?

Since my assessment-based curriculum is centered on visual literacy and driven by small-group projects, this project was essential in helping students answer these two key questions.

My students conducted several interviews during the course of the 10 week program. The interviews were primary sources. For the students these primary sources made history of a particular period more personal, vivid and dramatic. Oral history moves history from the study of abstract facts to the very personal and intimate. The teacher's role in this process is to gather mentor texts from the interviewee's era to increase a student's knowledge of the historical frame in question and connect it to the personal testimony of the interviewees. Once this goal is achieved, the other role of the teacher is to create mini-lessons teaching students how to draw parallels from the mentor texts with the personal testimony. The students then use this knowledge to create a poem, letter, short story, drawing, and/or skit. Teachers can use the literary pieces as a form of assessment to determine what the students are learning and how well they can apply their content knowledge to the interviewee's story. An oral history program can also help teachers to assess a student's research as well as social skills such as listening and developing skillful questioning techniques.

by Gerry Albarelli

Al Guerriero, an eighth grade Social Studies teacher at Intermediate School 126, saw right away the potential of oral history for his class. The value was apparent to him: his students, he said, did not see the importance of studying what had happened, say, in Europe fifty years ago. It was hard for them to see these old stories as important when they had their own unruly adolescent lives, their own difficult urban problems to deal with on a daily basis. But he thought—and it turned out to be the case—that if they had people standing in front of them, the living, breathing evidence that these events had had happened to people like them, that this would change.

In his class, over the next sixteen weeks, students heard firsthand testimony about immigration experiences, the Holocaust, the Chinese Revolution, and life in the segregated South.

Some of the stories made a deep impression on the students. I'm thinking in particular about Josephine Prins, who came to talk about her experiences ("when I was your age, just fourteen") in Auschwitz, where her mother and father were killed and where her job was to fold the clothes of people headed for \the gas chambers

Josephine Prins made an impression on the students because of the nature of her story but also because she defeated all their expectations. When they first heard that they were going to be interviewing someone who had survived the Holocaust they were excited and expected that this person would naturally be old, depressed and frail. When Josephine burst into the room, smiling, talking to two or three people at the same time, one of the students turned to me, his mouth open hung open and said, "*That's* Josephine? I can't believe it! She's so radiant!"

And many of the students, but that student in particular, went on to think about her and talk about her for weeks after her visit.

Here are some of the things the students had to say.

> Dear Josephine Prins,
>
> My name is Toure. I was ECSTATIC when we had your interview. It's a privilege for me to interview someone who has survived a nightmare of history.
>
> Sincerely,
> Toure

> Dear Josephine Prins,
>
> Thank you for coming to tell me about your story of struggle and triumph while in the Holocaust. When you began to tell your story, you sucked me into our world of pain. But then you also made me realize that regardless of what you went through you still came out a conqueror. I respect you for that.
>
> Sincerely,
> Asia

Here are two excerpts from that interview:

And then the Germans landed on May 10, 1940. With our small [Dutch] army we fought these Germans, and many of our soldiers died. And then of course we lost and they—and I lived in a seaside resort, and there were the dunes, and we saw the German parachuters land, and then from that day on, life became for the Dutch, as well for the Jewish Dutch, very difficult. Germans were very good to put the screw on every day. Every time they had another edict or another decree. Every week something else would be said. One week Jews could not buy all day in the stores, and then only between one and three. One week the Jews had to deliver to the bank—I have a paper on that edict, you could read it—to the bank their money. One week it was the Jews couldn't live in the seaside resorts

any more. And every time—until the beginning of 1942, they started to take the Jews and send them to Germany. But we never knew that it was something bad, or that somebody would be killed. We thought that they took these people because the German soldiers were fighting, that they took these people, sent them to the East, and let them work on their farms, in the factories, making weapons, whatever, that's what we thought, stupid us.

****

We went from prison in Holland to the Dutch concentration camp Westerbork in the train—regular train—and when we arrive there, we didn't know what was happening to us because I was 16 years old, what the heck did we know, right? Now, because you read books—but in my time, we didn't know that people could be that bad. I had no parents—no family. So we arrived in the camp, and my sister and I both were good-looking and my sister was older, and what was now my brother-in-law—I didn't know he would be my brother-in-law, but he was also prisoner in that camp—and he thought, "Hey, that girl looks good. [Students laugh] Maybe I can get into contact with her." Which he did, and they were together, and we knew that we would be sent to Auschwitz, so after—was it January 27th? I don't know. Have you been to the Museum of Jewish Heritage? And did you see all the things, and the cattle cars and everything? [Student says "yes"] In that cattle car is all the people herded in there, we were sent to Auschwitz, no water, no food, no restroom, no—you know to do whatever. It so happened my—what is now my brother-in-law, the three of us went in that transport—by the way, that transport was one thousand eighty people, how many do you think came back?

Student: Eighty?

Prins: Eight.

Students: Ooh!

Prins: And from these eight, what was now my brother-in-law, my sister, and I. So we are miracles. I am a miracle, I don't know why I'm here. Maybe to tell the story? So we arrived at Auschwitz. And my sister and I, we went to this big holes, and then all of a sudden I saw in the corner, naked people—I thought of men. And in my time, I never ever even undressed in front of my father and mother. That's how we were brought up. So I was very prim and prudent. And everybody in the camp—"You, you swine, swine, pigs, pigs, undress, undress!" And we would all undress, and I was one of the last one undressed, and it was eighteen below zero at the time. It was January, 1944, and there were tables with girls sitting there and you had to give your arm, and they did bzzzzzzz with tattoos. But what did we know it was a tattoo? We didn't even know what a tattoo was. So and you can still see it. This one is smudged. I wanted to, you know, take the number off—I didn't know—see this is smudged. From that moment we were numbers. Then we were shorn of all the hairs we had, wherever you had hair, and at that moment you became from a human—vermin, a number, and nothing—the only thing what was in your mind was to survive, if you had the guts.

The students were captivated and moved by Josephine's story, but it was not only the dramatic stories that caught their attention. They also heard and were interested in stories about their own neighborhood fifty years ago.

They heard stories of quiet heroism, sad stories, funny stories and strange and surprising stories, brave stories. They heard from Rosalie Long who told them about how she defied the Jim Crow laws as a girl in South Carolina. They were interested but maybe only moderately enthusiastic when they heard her tell that story. That changed when their teacher asked them to see the story in historical context. "She refused to sit at the back of the bus. That's really amazing," he said. "I mean, really, think about it. I mean, why does history remember Rosa Parks and not Rosalie Long?"

Then it was as if that class had discovered—and in a sense they really had—this woman who had been overlooked by history. They were proud that they had met her.

The teacher's job of course is to frame the stories, to provide the background or the context that can make a story suddenly come into focus for the class.

When you bring in—as we did—people from the neighborhood to talk about their experiences of history, the same history that is in the textbooks, you go a long way toward breaking down the sense that students have that history is something contained in textbooks and textbooks only. You also help to break down the separation between what goes on in the classroom and what goes on in the world outside the classroom, especially the world that counts to students, the local world of the neighborhood. What you're actually doing is helping them to find the world in the neighborhood.

From an Interview with Al Guerriero, 8th grade Social Studies Teacher

Curricular Goals

My expectations were that the Oral History Project was going to somehow bring history alive to what we were doing, and that last year was about immigration and how immigrants assimilate into American culture and some of the obstacles that they have while arriving and settling in America, which is what we did. Also for students to get to know their neighborhood, because in this neighborhood you had Jacob Riis, you had Louis Hine photographing a lot of what was going on during that time, like child labor and things of that sort. So I wanted them to understand, to create these parallels that although Jacob Riis and Louis Hine were a hundred years ago, at the same time things are still going on today like they did a hundred years ago.

Josephine Prins: Another Perspective

I remember the reaction because that was the one that probably had the most impact, not just for the students but for me as well. We had two classes interview her together, because I thought it was important for them to see her, because we were already doing a unit with the Language Arts teacher on the Holocaust, and they were reading a lot of these materials. They read Wiesel's Night. They were reading other short story type of texts; some of them had read The Diary of Anne Frank. They did a lot of reading. But I didn't feel like—you know, let's make it more real—and I don't want to show them the boring documentaries that are out there about World War II or the Holocaust, I wanted it real, I wanted them to meet somebody, to feel history.

Josephine had written a piece on when she returned back to Holland, I believe, and she met this doctor. So what we did after the interview was we looked at her letter. Because a lot of what she said in the interview, she also had written in this letter, and we looked at it, and we kind of compared other things that we had heard about the Holocaust, and tried again to draw those parallels between what her experience was and this character—it was a fictional piece but it was still a developed story about this character who experiences the Holocaust. Some of the students read Anne Frank, like I said earlier, so they were also doing that as well, like, "Oh, she was also a young girl, like Anne Frank. She lost her parents. Well you know Anne Frank loses her mother and eventually loses her own life, so there's despair and tragedy in both stories."

Some students had a Power Point presentation that they wanted to do on the Holocaust afterwards, because they got really motivated. I think that's the thing. I think that having an oral history project and having someone like Josephine come in, I think it inspires students as well, and that's the other thing that I wanted to achieve, which I think we did achieve, was to give them some sense of motivation but also so they can develop a sense of ownership, like, "Yeah, I met this lady and now I want to tell the story." So it's almost like this chain reaction that occurs when you have someone like this come in and talk about a story like this.

And as far as their expectations of her and how she did not fulfill them, I did turn it into a lesson because a lot of them were saying, "Well it was because of the photographs that

we saw. We saw a lot of negativity." And certainly it was a negative moment in history, but what we came out of it with was that even though Josephine went through this pain and this sorrow—you can still endure a lot as a human being, you can still endure a great deal and still come out happy. I think that in itself tells kids, "all right, so maybe there is hope. Maybe there truly is hope in life." Because a lot of these kids, I could tell, based on conversations, there's no hope, you know? And I don't know if they realize it now at that age, but they're telling me in a way that, "I don't really have any hope." Here's a woman who clearly had every reason to hate the world as some of them do right now at thirteen-fourteen years old and in some ways rightfully so, but they certainly didn't experience what she experienced. They in my opinion got out of it, "All right, here's this element of tragedy or sorrow, but this person's making it into a positive type of reaction—a positive experience, so maybe I should do the same."

Partnering With Outside Organizations

The work we did to design this curriculum was rooted in a network of partnerships. We found that the work required to build and sustain these relationships was well worth the rewards for students as learners, for the school as a community-based organization, and for us as professionals. One of the first things we do in a Telling Lives oral history project is to introduce the partners. We want students to know us, and to know where they're headed in terms of a final product even as they begin the project. Here are some of the artists, educators, and experts who worked together to make the Chinatown Telling Lives project possible:

Oral Historians
Amy Starecheski and Gerry Albarelli, the main authors of this guide, were at the crux of this network of partners. They worked most closely with teachers, finding ways to fit oral history into their curricula and classrooms and collaboratively designing lesson plans. They came into each classroom twice a week to teach or co-teach (with the classroom teacher) the oral history lessons.

Amy Starecheski is an experienced educator and oral historian. She has trained adults and young people ages four to twenty in oral history interviewing. Dozens of her interviews are archived in the Oral History Research Office collection. She is currently pursuing a degree in English Education at Teachers College.

Gerry Albarelli has worked as an educator and oral historian for many years. He is also a filmmaker and a writer whose stories and essays have been published widely. His book, *Teacha! Stories from a Yeshiva*, chronicles his experience teaching English as a Second Language to Yiddish-speaking Hasidic boys at a yeshiva in Brooklyn. At the yeshiva and in many other classes, he has made storytelling the center of his curriculum. He is on the faculties of Eugene Lang and Sarah Lawrence College.

Museums
The Museum of Chinese in the Americas (MoCA) is the first fulltime, professionally staffed museum dedicated to reclaiming, preserving, and interpreting the history and culture of Chinese and their descendants in the Western Hemisphere. Their staff, led by Deputy Director of Programs Cynthia Lee, played an essential role in contextualizing our work for the students, both historically (through educational programs at the museum) and in terms of the important work of actively documenting history. MoCA helped our students to understand what it means to collect, preserve, and present oral histories. Without their time and expertise we would not have been able to conceptualize, create, and promote the exhibit that was the culmination of our students' work.

Artists/Media Experts
Downtown Community Television
We worked with instructors from the Emmy Award-winning media center DCTV (Downtown Community Television Center). DCTV instructors taught students the basics of documentary pre-production, production and post-production and helped them to

produce a 25-minute documentary, *Chinatown Telling Lives*, based on oral history testimony. *Chinatown Telling Lives* profiles three long-time residents of Chinatown. It includes oral history testimony, archival photos and illustrations made by students. While the fact that students were using technology in order to make a movie was enormously appealing to them, the emphasis was still on oral history. For instance, in teaching the students camera skills, we had them conduct numerous practice interviews. These practice interviews were oral history interviews as opposed to the more focused, present tense interviews that often are used in documentaries. The students worked in three production teams, which they themselves named (NYC Bratz, Disturbing the Peace…) and made all the major production decisions for the documentary.

Storytellers

Telling stories is an experience central to the human experience. In an oral history project, we are teaching students one formalized way of telling and listening to stories. We try to situate the oral history method within the larger context of storytelling, relating it to stories told around a fire, around the dinner table, or on the city stoop. We also try to relate oral history to the work of different kinds of professional storytellers.

In one of our classes we invited Amatullah Saleem, an expert storyteller from the Elders Share the Arts "Pearls of Wisdom" program, to tell us stories from her own life. Three classes watched a storytelling performance by Margaret Yuen, a Chinese American dancer, storyteller, and teaching artist. She told a few short stories about her childhood in Chinatown, and then performed the story of her father's life. She'd created a performance, using dance, music, and simple costumes to help her tell his story, from her own memories and supplemental research. After the performance, she answered follow-up questions about her stories and her artistic process. By giving the students this experience we intended to help them to think about ways to use art to bring the stories they'd collected to life in their final presentations and to introduce them to storytelling as a profession. We also wanted them to have the experience of being able to relax and enjoy a masterfully told story, without the pressure of having to ask questions.

Some of our most enthusiastic and experienced interviewees, needing little help to tell their stories, actually ended up giving the students an experience similar to the experience provided by the professional storytellers. Auschwitz survivor Josephine Prins, profiled in the Chapter Two section on Social Studies and oral history, was one of these. You will notice when you read excerpts from her interview that she asks the students more questions than they ask her, and that she moves her story forward on her own, seeming to anticipate their questions. Emergency Medical Technician Jay Swithers, whose transcript is at the end of Chapter One, beginning on page 28, was another.

Writer and storyteller Gale Jackson visited some of our classes, where she told and performed traditional African tales. Since these stories were about origins of names and speech itself as well as about the fundamental importance for human beings of storytelling, we had students write a one-page essay titled, "The Story of My Name" directly after the performance. In the remaining weeks of the program, we had students work on other personal stories. We used these stories as a bridge between the narratives

the students had been hearing from the interviewees and the possibility that their own personal stories had greater historical significance than they may have previously thought. These writing assignments, while they were always autobiographical, stressed sometimes subtly, sometimes in a more overt way, the fact that students' stories were related to something larger. (For instance, in one assignment we had students start by drawing a picture of their home and then write a story about themselves in their own neighborhoods.)

Photographers

We knew from the beginning that our final products would be much more lively if they included photographs of the students and their interviewees. We decided to put the cameras into the kids' hands, and purchased six digital cameras for them to use. Each interview and field trip had three rotating designated student photographers, who were charged with visually documenting the experience. As part of the introduction to the project, each class had one period with a documentary photographer named Tom Holton. He had been working on an intensive project in their neighborhood for years, documenting the life of the Lam family, recent immigrants from Hong Kong. Tom brought in some of his favorite photography books and had students choose their favorite photos and describe why they like them. He then gave the students some basic instruction on framing, looking for powerful details, and telling a story visually. The cameras were very easy to use, and the students required almost no technical instruction.

After each class, the oral historians downloaded and filed the photos, so that we were able to bring them in for the students to use as they created their books, artwork, and exhibit. Each class got to look at a printout of their collected works near the end of the project, and each student could select a few pictures they wanted printed for their personal use. This was time consuming, but not expensive, as we used a basic office color printer.

Visual Arts – For our books, we worked with a graphic designer and comic book artists. See the section on Oral History Books, page 96, for a more detailed description of this process.

Mental Health Professionals

The Chinatown Telling Lives Project had one element that it is unlikely that any of your projects will have: we worked closely with mental health clinicians, who played a dual role in the classroom. We had seen in earlier work that students seemed to get some comfort from hearing the life stories of older people and thinking about how their own life stories fit into history. The clinicians were in the classrooms with us to research our work, both to learn to use oral history in their clinical work and to determine whether or not participating in an oral history project built resilience in young people (the verdict is still out). The clinicians were also there to provide support if students or interviewees got particularly upset by the vivid stories they were hearing and telling. For a discussion of how we handled it when students were upset by the stories, see the FAQs, page 9. For more on our work with clinicians and researchers from the NYU Child Study Center, see Mary Marshall Clark's foreword: The Story of Telling Lives, page 4.

Edited Sample Interview with Rosalie Long:

Student: Today is April 26, 2004 and I'm Melinda from Intermediate School 131 and this class is 805 and we are interviewing—

Long: —Rosalie Long at Abyssinian Baptist Church.

Long: Good morning. It's nice to meet you. Kevin McGruder told me to come in so that I could share some of the stories that I experienced as a young student in school during the thirties and the forties. Because I don't mind telling you my birthday, I was born May 20, 1924. God willing, May 20, 2004 I will turn four-score. Four-score, which is 80 years old. I was born in Hopkins, South Carolina, but I was raised in Columbia, South Carolina, the capital of South Carolina.

I would really like to share some of my stories because after slavery, when Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves, and even when I was a girl, people were still not free. Not the black people. Then we were called Negroes and colored. On my birth certificate, where they have "Race of the Child Born", they have "Colored". So in the state of South Carolina, where I was born in Columbia, South Carolina, we were called "colored people". But yet there were times when you were referred to as "Negroes" and for a female, girl they would call you a "Negra" or "Negress", but always for the male a "Negro".

Black people did not have any civil rights during that time. You couldn't vote. You were not allowed in many places, because of the color of your skin. In the South at that time they had segregation, deep segregation and Jim-Crowism. The Jim-Crowism was to always remind you that because you were black, you had to know your station in life. In other words, if you rode the bus with your mother, you knew you were supposed to go to the back of the bus. Your parents taught you that. If they took you shopping and you went into a store, your mother always told you, "Don't touch anything." So those were some of the things that we had to endure. So actually that Jim-Crowism was sort of like embedded in you and you knew that it was best to apply to the rules or else you might get hurt or accidents might happen.

However, during my school years—especially the summer months—we had to walk through the downtown section coming from my high school. So many of us with our books on our backs would stop in Woolworth's and Cress, you know 5&10 stores? The fountains were on the wall for drinking, they had "Colored" and "White". So many, many times, when we would go in the store to get some water we went directly to the "White" fountain. The guard would come over and say, "Don't you know where you're supposed to drink?" And we—with all our books on our back, we would tell the guard, "We can't read." And then we would run out of the store.

When I entered nursing, my nursing dormitory was near the new hospital that they had built before I had entered, but our dormitory was next to some railroad tracks. The dormitory for the white nurses was on a nice beautiful street with trees and lawns and,

you know, grass and everything. The building I trained in was called the "Colored Unit. As students, we were called "Nurse-nurse", but we had to address the white students as well as our superiors, as "Miss".

So anyway, you trained three years to become a nurse, and of course you had to take the state boards. But when we took the state boards, the black as well as the white nurses took the boards together in the state building in South Carolina, where they still want to fly that Confederate Flag. Believe it or not, they had the students all mixed in. And of course the reason for that is so that you wouldn't cheat, because naturally you wouldn't know the white students and the white students wouldn't know you.

Student: Could you describe an important time in your childhood?

Long: What?

Student: Could you describe an important thing in your childhood?

Long: Oh, you mean during my childhood? Okay, so I can tell you the story of when I was thirteen years old. It happened in 1937. During that time, if you rode a bus, or a train, you had to sit in the back of the bus, or they would have a special coach for blacks. So what happened is when I was thirteen, I wrote my uncle in Flint, Michigan and asked him if I could come to visit two weeks during the summer vacation, because there was very little that you could do in the summer except going to the library, or maybe your church picnic, because you weren't allowed to go to any swimming pools, you couldn't go to any museums, if you went to the theater, you had to walk up steps and sit in the balcony. And the stairs were made from the street and not from the theater. So you had to walk up those stairs and then you'd end up in the balcony. But, believe it or not, even though it was segregation, we felt that we could see better in the balcony than you could in the orchestra section.

So my uncle did send me the ticket to come and visit. So when I left, when I got on the bus, I did not get on the bus with the intention of taking the seat behind the driver, I knew that I was supposed to go to the back. But, for some reason, I sat in the seat behind the driver's seat. I had a lot of books in my hands; a lot of books, and my mother had fixed me a nice lunch. So I sat there until the driver said, "All aboard. All aboard." And he was ready to pull the bus out of the terminal. So, when he said, "All aboard", he noticed that I was sitting there, and I could sense him looking at me, but I had one of my books wide open and I just kept my eyes in my book. I didn't look up at the driver. But three times he said, "All Negroes go to the back", which meant me, but I did not look up at him. The black people that had gotten on the bus, they were in the back. They said, "Little girl, come on back here, because we don't want any trouble." But I didn't look around, I didn't respond to their comments and finally the bus driver decided to drive, to leave.

He might have thought that I was deaf and dumb, because even though I was being defiant, he didn't know the game I was playing, you see; he didn't know the game I was

playing. I was laughing on the inside, but I kept my eyes in my book. I didn't look up at him. I noticed two white ladies sitting across from me and they were—I could sense them saying, "I wonder why she won't move." So I just didn't move. Finally the bus driver drove the bus off.

The next place I had to change I think was some place in North Carolina or Virginia, and when I got on the buses there, I sat in the seat, but those drivers didn't say anything—of course you were still in the South. But finally I arrived in Flint, Michigan, and my uncle met me and I told him what had happened. So long before Rosa Parks decided not to give up her seat in 1955, that was December 1955, I had had that experience on my own without any coaching from anyone. I just felt—I knew what Jim-Crowism meant, I knew what segregation meant, and so I just defied it at that particular time. Now when I told my uncle and my parents about it, they said, "Oh gee, you could've gotten hurt." But I didn't even think about things like that. I was just a regular thirteen-year old girl, a black girl, or whatever they called us then, colored or Negro or whatever. That was an experience that I will never forget.

Are there any other questions?

I'd like to ask a question. Now have they studied anything in history yet about what is Jim-Crowism and segregation in the South?

Gerry: I believe so.

Student: Yes, we're studying that in our Social Studies class.

Long: If you went into the stores to buy, you know if you went shopping on the main street, and store you went in, if there were any people in there, white people, and even though you were in line next to be served, they would not serve you, they would serve all of the white people first and then they would come to you once all of those people were out of the store, you know, things like that.

Gerry: I have a question, and you all should be thinking of questions. She's given you so much. Asia, you might even have a question. She's given you so much, right? She's told you how she defied the segregation laws, but I think there must have been some very particular, even scary instances of racism in her childhood and I want to hear maybe some stories about that.

Long: Yes, well, when walking to school at that particular time, we not only had to walk through the downtown section to get to my high school, but we also had to pass the University of South Carolina, and they didn't want you to walk on the sidewalk, so there were fights between the blacks and the whites. The white kids would come along and push you off the sidewalk. It was more or less the boys that would fight; very seldom the girls would fight.

Gerry: I want to see if we can get some good questions.

Long: Questions, yes.

Gerry: Peter, sit up first, because when somebody is talking to you, it's important to show that you are listening.

Student: Can you tell us about your parents?

Long: My mother was nineteen when I was born. My father was twenty. My mother had lost her parents at an early age, so therefore I didn't know the grandparents on her side of the family. But my mother was the strongest parent in the family. She had seven children, and she worked in service. She was a cook and a maid.

My father did go out to work, but during that time, people did not have good jobs. First he had a job, where he worked at a very elegant, exclusive women's apparel store, but he was the deliveryman. Then they didn't have cars or trucks to deliver anything, he had to deliver those packages on a bicycle.

I had a great relationship with my mother. Even though she didn't finish high school, as soon as she came home, the first thing she would say is "Get your books", you know, "Do your homework", I'll never forget that. If you had not done your homework, you did not eat your dinner until you had done your homework.

Chapter Three:
So How Do I Do It?

After reading the first two chapters of this guide, we hope you have a picture of what oral history is and how it might fit into your classroom. You probably have questions about logistics, lesson plans, and managing an oral history project. This chapter is designed to answer those questions. We explain the three basic types of interviews we used: the classroom interview, the peer interview, and the at-home interview. There are activities for improving students' interviewing skills and a section on field trips. You'll read a sample interview with James Macklin, who has lived through being orphaned, sharecropping, drug addiction, homelessness and poor health, and is now a successful advocate for the homeless.

Classroom Interviewing – How It Works

Getting Ready for the Interview: Research

The kind and extent of research you do to prepare for your interviews will depend on the grade level, disciplinary framework, and time constraints of your classroom. Especially in a Social Studies classroom, you may want to frame classroom interviews with extensive background research. In English classrooms, we've ranged from verbally giving a three-minute outline of the interviewee's life story to intensively exploring a variety of texts to frame the interview. Because of time restraints, we did not generally have students conduct their own research. Instead, we did the work of collecting the materials, and gave students time in class to read, discuss, and process them.

For example, to prepare for interviews with garment workers we brought in poems, newspaper articles, union pamphlets, memoirs, oral history interviews, and photographs about garment workers. Each group of students had to read their text and figure out a way to present it to the class. Students presented choral readings of poetry, summaries of newspaper articles, and skits based on memoirs. At the end of the exercise, the class had access to a shared body of knowledge from which they could draw when forming questions. We did a similar exercise to prepare for a trip to the local police precinct, having students rotate through a series of stations that had newspaper stories about crime in Chinatown and oral histories with gang members and cops.

For an interview with an Afghan American we asked about students' prior knowledge of Afghan culture and history, then gave a short lecture, with map handouts, to fill in some of the blanks. The timeline we drew during this lecture stayed on the board during the interview. The interview took place as students were in the middle of listening to The Breadwinner, a novel about a young girl growing up under the Taliban, as a read-aloud.

To prepare for interviews that covered life in the segregated South we read Leon's Story, a beautiful little book based on a series of oral history interviews with Leon Walter Tillage, who grew up as a sharecropper, as a read-aloud, framed by discussion.

It is important to note here that much of the research that took place during our oral history project happened after the interviews, and grew out of burning questions the interviews raised for the students. HIV/AIDS, Rodney King, World War II, and the Cultural Revolution were explored in this way.

Getting Ready for the Interview: Planning Questions

When students have a list of carefully prepared questions in hand, they tend to stop listening, instead waiting for the first opportunity to ask their questions. They favor the safe, written questions over responsive follow-up questions. Although we sometimes use question-planning sheets like the one on page 114 to help students think of and organize questions, we often don't have students hold them during the interview. (Note: a structured worksheet can be a big help in reminding students to ask questions about all

parts of the interviewee's life – to use the biographical approach we've taught them.) We may let each student have one question on an index card, or we may post some excellent questions or question starters on the board. Having at least one prepared question can help shyer students to participate.

We often integrate the planning of questions into the research, making it another step in the research process. This can range from doing a whole class brainstorm of questions, which can be posted on the board during the interview, to having students write questions for homework or as classwork, alone or in groups. It can be challenging to find the delicate balance between preparing students enough so they feel as comfortable and confident as possible going into the interview, and so that their questions are effective and well-informed, and creating a situation in which the interviewee can tell their story in the way most comfortable to them and students can be flexible enough to follow an unexpected turn in the story.

Bryce Bernard's has been very successful in telling students to ONLY ask follow-up questions during an interview, explaining that they're interviewing for narrative, and are trying to *build* a story. See the interview with him on page 46 for more on this.

Several Options for Managing Classroom Interviews

Our curriculum is centered around the in-class interview, because we want as many students as possible to hear the fabulous stories of our interviewees, because it's easier to find a few interviewees to come in to class than to find one for every student, because the interviews create shared texts for the class and because listening to stories together builds community. The prospect of conducting an oral history interview with an entire class of students can be daunting, and we've handled it in different ways. We've done interviews in the classroom or on field trips to senior centers, the American Legion, churches, and anywhere else we can fit thirty kids and hear a story. We've had the entire class conduct an interview together, and just tried to make the process as inclusive as possible by calling on different kids, or counting on the interviewee to do it. When we've needed a little more structure we've had students work in groups to think of questions related to one part of the interviewee's life (childhood, work, school, etc.…), and asked each group to ask the questions when we get to their part of the story.

Generally, for a whole-class interview, we designate one student as the audio recorder (and it can be an effective behavior management strategy to choose a student who tends to cause trouble in this engaging role), one to tell the interviewee about the project, one to say the date and place, and one to ask the first question.

Every teacher needs to find the role they feel most comfortable with in an interview. Often, a teacher will break into the interview to connect something the interviewee said to prior course work, or just to help the students, and the interviewee, to keep the chronology straight. You might say, "OK, so we've heard wonderful stories about Ramee Mosher's childhood in Kabul, Afghanistan and he's told you about the Soviet Invasion in 1979, which we talked about yesterday. He told you about his father and a

little bit about his mother. We know he came to New York when he was a teenager. What information are we missing? Who can ask the next question?"

Sometimes we really step back and allow the class to almost totally control an interview – asking bad questions, taking fruitless tangents, and sometimes learning something totally new. You can read James Macklin's transcript at the end of Chapter Three, page 86, to see an interview closer to this end of the continuum. Students can learn from their mistakes in this kind of setting, seeing first hand what happens when they ask a series of yes or no questions or fail to follow up. At other times, we actually ask many of the questions, modeling skilled interviewing for students and giving them the experience of hearing lots of rich stories. We might not actually ask the questions, but prompt students to ask the questions we think need to be asked. The interview with Jay Swithers, in Chapter One, is an example of this kind of interview. Gerry found one particularly effective kind of break-in, which he explains below:

Keeping the Interview Alive: Acting Out the Story

In addition to having students put on skits based on their interviews, we also in my classes occasionally put on skits during an interview. I would say, "I need an actor." And then have the interviewee tell the students what would have been happening at that moment in his or her story. This was good for helping interviewees who were having a hard time remembering something or bringing the interview to life. It reinforced the idea on both sides that what we were looking for was scenes. It also was good for the students, literally drawing them into the story, and capturing everyone's attention. Students helped an interviewee, for instance, tell about his experiences registering African Americans for the vote during the civil rights period in Mississippi. He said, "People would yell at me. 'You register us to vote but then you go away and we have trouble.'" "Okay," I said, "who wants to be the woman who yells at him." "And the Ku Klux Klan was always following me." "Who wants to be Ku Klux Klan?" It was a lively interview; and before you knew it half the class was up at the front of the room taking part in the scene. The interviewee, who hadn't realized that this was going to happen (since I hadn't; I thought of it on the spot, but then did it again because it was so successful) was at first perplexed and surprised and later delighted. Here is a transcript of this method in practice, excerpted from an interview with Rosalie Long, who grew up in the segregated South:

Student: You said that the parents taught the children how to stay in their place, so can you tell us a story about when a child didn't stay in their place?

Long: Well, if you did touch something in a store, the clerk would come over and reprimand you. Then when you got home, your mother would give you a spanking for not—

Student: —oh, twice the trouble.

Long: Right. Yes, so that's what would happen. The clerk in the store would come over to you and reprimand you and make you feel like you were just nobody. Then when you got home, your mother would give you a spanking.

Gerry: Okay. If they were doing a play, Cheyenne is a very good actor. Cheyenne, come somewhere over here because we need a good dialogue.

Student: Is it offensive?

Gerry: I just want to get a little dialogue.

First thing I think we need to know, who would like to be the young Rosalie? Now we need somebody to be Rosalie's mother. I want to know what exactly Rosalie's mother would tell her to stay in her place. What kind of language would she use? We need to ask Mrs. Long to tell us.

Long: Your mother would say, "Didn't I tell you not to touch anything when you go in the store?"

Gerry: Okay, this is the pre-shopping warning. What did she say about those white people, those people? Give me an example.

Long: She would say, "Didn't I tell you not to touch anything in the store? You know you're not supposed to do that."

Gerry: You say it to your daughter over there.

Student: Oh, look.

Student: I didn't touch anything.

Gerry: So now we're going on a shopping trip. What's the name of the store? Do you remember what the name of the store was?

Long: It could be Woolworth's or—Woolworth's.

Gerry: So this is the clerk, and here we come in. What would be for sale in Woolworth's?

Long: Maybe she wanted to look at—touch something like a pencil or a notebook pad, or something.

Gerry: Okay, now I need you to tell me exactly how he would make her feel like nobody. What would he say?

Long: He might even say, "You little black nigger, what are you touching those things for? You know you're not supposed to touch them!"

[Students refuse to say the word nigger.]

Gerry: You've got to say it, it's history.

Long: It's history. He'd say, "You little nigger, don't you know you're not supposed to touch anything in this store?" And then your mother would respond and say, "Come over here! You know I told you not to touch anything in this store!" And she would also say, "Wait until I get you home!"

Student: Come on over here! I told you not to touch anything! Wait until we get home!

Teaching Listening Skills

Listening, as much as asking questions, is at the heart of the oral history interview. We always have a discussion with the students about how to *show* you're listening, reminding them to ask follow-up questions, sit up straight, not fidget, make eye contact, and nod their heads.

For example, Gerry always talks to students about the kinds of stories they might be hearing which really demand that students pay careful and respectful attention. "Imagine you are interviewing a Holocaust survivor who is telling you about how her parents were murdered in a concentration camp. She's crying— and you're whispering, laughing, staring off into space. How do you imagine this will make her feel? For one thing, she might decide not to tell you anything else or anything else too personal." This example always seemed to make an impression on students.

Intergenerational Pitfalls and Possibilities – Conversations Across the Generations

"I'm eighty-nine years old," said the man who had come to be interviewed by the class of seventh graders. "I was born in nine-teen thirteen"

I turned and saw a small boy in the first seat of the first row open his mouth in surprise. He then mouthed the word "Wow."

Old people - very old people - are naturally interesting to young people. Old people sometimes seemed in my classrooms to bring out a certain tenderness in our students and of course a raucous delight when they discovered that for all their remoteness the old people had stories much like their own. Tell us about a time you got into trouble? Tell us about your first love? Tell us about an embarrassing moment?

How did you meet your husband? a student asked an old woman, afraid that he was asking for information that was too personal.

She shrugged: It was a pick-up.

The oral history interview is an opportunity for very old people and very young people to get together and discover what they do and do not have in common and to learn each about the world of the other, separated by a great gulf of time. For the old people I found that it was generally an afternoon well spent. ("I had such a nice time. They're nice kids. I haven't talked so much in years.")

Of course every once in a while the old people did take the opportunity to tell the young people how to live. This is to be expected. Young people are used to stories being used in this way and whenever the old people became too preachy, or whenever the preachiness drowned out the story, the young people's attention wandered off. They responded to the lesson with bored silence.

Then I would step in by asking a question. "Tell us a story." And to the students I would say, "Here is someone who has lived through so much history, has seen things you'll never see. What do you want to hear about?" And little by little, after a brief pause, the hands went up again and this important conversation across great stretches of time continued.

Conducting Peer Interviews

Young people have stories too, and a successful oral history project can bring the students' stories into the classroom. Peer interviews can help your students to tell and to think about their own life stories.

This lesson goes well after or with a timeline activity, because you can move directly from looking at how interviewees' lives intersect with history to looking at the historical context of student lives. It also works as an early experience trying out interviewing or for more advanced interviewers to practice interviewing on their own. If you only have single periods you can do the pre-interview activities on a different day and assign the writing for homework, or do it the next day.

Time: At least 90 minutes, can be extended.

Goals:

- Build class community
- Demonstrate how students' lives intersect with history
- Help students to begin to tell their own stories
- Build empathy
- Improve interviewing skills, especially listening and asking questions
- Give students another perspective on interviewing: that of the interviewee
- Give practice writing for interviews
- Open the door to explore issues of responsibility to interviewees and issues of representation

1. Hook: Share an example of an oral history interview conducted with a teenager. An excerpt from New Kids in Town, a collection of interviews with immigrant teens, could work here.

2. Ask: What historical events have you all lived through? What questions could you ask about them? Record class responses.

3. We've interviewed/talked about interviewing mostly older people. What would be different if you interviewed someone your own age? What could you ask them? Brainstorm a good long list of possible questions and topics. Post or have students take notes.

4. Tell students they will be working in pairs to interview each other. You can assign the pairs or ask students to choose someone they don't know well. Emphasize that students should ask good, deep questions, but not pry, and to be respectful if their partner does not want to discuss a certain topic. Review listening skills. Be very clear that each person will be interviewer and interviewee, and that they are not to switch roles prematurely. You can have them record the interviews or take VERY BRIEF notes. They should be focusing on listening, not writing. Tell them they will

be assigned to write about the person they interviewed, so they may want to keep that in mind when deciding what notes to take. Remind them to start at the beginning by asking about childhood.

5. Give at least 20-30 minutes for each student to be interviewed.

6. Free write on this experience. Possible topics: How was it different from other interviewing you've done? What did you learn? What was hard about it? What was it like to be interviewed? What did you like?

7. Assignment: Draft a story from the perspective of the person you interviewed. Use "I".

Another context for peer interviews:

In an oral history unit centered around issues of identity, 8th grade English teacher Bryce Bernards used this activity after students had conducted several whole-class interviews but before they had to do interviews at home on their own. He began the activity by asking each student, in their journal, to write down a story that shaped their identity. This helped the students when it was time for them to be interviewed because they had at least one story they knew they could tell. The students used microcassette recorders to record their peer interviews, which Bryce said worked well because they were inexpensive enough that they could buy enough for each pair to have one, and using equipment helped students to keep focused on and invested in their task. Each student had to interview for a half hour and then be interviewed for a half hour. Their first assignment was to write a narrative anecdote from the life of the person they interviewed. Many students used the microcassette recordings as a reference during this writing process. Next, Bryce asked them to "riff" off one element of the anecdote, essentially writing fiction from the oral history. Bryce thought the activity was so successful that he would do it again, pairing the students up differently.

The At-Home Interview

Amy Starecheski

Many oral history projects are based completely around the home interview. In contrast, the heart of our project was interviews conducted in class, in groups. One of the reasons to do so many supervised interviews in class is to fully prepare students for their at-home interviews. In a sense, these are the culmination of each student's individual engagement with the oral history process. An individual interview also provides a way to assess this engagement.

Many of our students complained bitterly about the home interviews, mainly about the work they entailed. A greater or equal number said it was the most rewarding part of the project:

Winnie Li, 8th grader at Middle School 131:

My favorite part of the oral history project was the interview I got to do at home. It is because I got to learn more things about my grandmother and that she could feel special letting others know about her life/childhood.

This feedback led us to further refine the way we present and scaffold this element of the project. What follows are our best ideas about how to make this work in your classroom.

Arranging, conducting, and transcribing an interview on their own is a daunting prospect for most students, but it is absolutely possible, especially if the teacher carefully prepares the conditions for success. I try to introduce the home interview – not in a lot of detail, but as an idea – quite close to the beginning of the project, so that students have as much time as possible to think about and plan their interviews. I start out, as I describe the project, by telling them that we'll be doing interviews in class, and that they'll get a lot of professional training in interviewing skills, and that they will then each have the opportunity to take a recorder home to do an interview on their own. I tell them it has to be with an adult, over a certain age, but that it doesn't have to be someone in their family.

Finding An Interviewee

Finding someone to interview is often the most intimidating part of the project for a student. I encourage students who do choose to interview a family member not to do their parents, because parents often are not willing to share many things about their lives with their young children. Grandparents, aunts, and uncles are often more forthcoming. It is important to keep in mind that many students may, for various reasons, not want to interview anyone from their family. These students may need help finding someone from the school community or another adult to interview. To make this easier, I have gone with students to ask cafeteria workers, security guards, administrators, or maintenance staff. Before the project began, I sent out a letter to the entire school community telling them about the project and asking them to let me know if they wanted to be interviewed. In a busy school environment, I didn't get many replies, but at least everyone in the school knew about the project and had some context when students approached them for interviews. After the first year, I knew of at least a dozen people in the school who were

good interviewees, which would cut down on the work the second time around. Of course, it is important not to over-burden these generous individuals. A formal acknowledgement, an invitation to the closing event, or a gift certificate to a neighborhood coffee shop could be a nice thank you. I have heard of teachers setting up a time (or times) after school when veterans, seniors, or other adults can come to the school to be interviewed individually by students. I also suggest that students approach adults at their after school programs, place of worship, sports teams, jobs etc.… I provide letters, in all local languages, for students to give to the people they approach, explaining the project and the interview process. (page 115)

Planning/Research

Once a student selects their interviewee, they fill out the interview-planning sheet (page 116). In a middle school English classroom, I don't emphasize research. In a Social Studies or History classroom you might want to guide the students through a more intensive research process. A completed interview-planning sheet is the student's ticket to sign out a recorder. I give them about one week to find someone and complete it, although this deadline is flexible because there will be students who will take longer, like those who are interviewing adults they meet through the teacher.

Students are often nervous about their interviews. It helped to role-play the beginning of the interview, having students' practice introducing them, explaining the project, asking for the release form, and beginning the interview.

Equipment

You do not have to have a lot of equipment for students to do home interviews. They can use their own equipment, if they have it. They can also take notes during the interview, instead of transcribing it. Here's how I used equipment: I had fifteen recorders, shared among four classes of thirty students each. I tried to focus on one or two classes at a time, so that the disruption of signing recorders in and out was more contained. When they signed out the recorders students got an interviewing packet with the letter of invitation, assignment sheet/checklist, transcription guidelines, rubric, and a release form in English, Chinese, or Spanish, depending on their interviewee's language. As each class started their home interviews, I went over the packet with them, role playing taking out all of the papers, getting the interviewee to sign a release, etc.…

Each student had one chance only to sign out a recorder, either over a weekend or for half of a school week. During this time they had to do their interview and their transcription. If they didn't get it done they got a second chance after everyone else was finished. If they didn't bring back the recorder in time, they lost points for the project. See Equipment Tracking Sheet and Equipment Sign Out Sheet (pages 119 and 120) for the forms I used to keep track of my equipment.

Transcription

I asked my 8th graders to transcribe at least two pages of their favorite part of the interview, and to mark that part on the minidisc so I could listen to it. As they began actually conducting their home interviews, I did this mini-lesson with each class.

Transcription Mini Lesson

Time: 15-20 minutes
Materials: Overhead or butcher paper, minidisc (or tape) player with speakers, recorded interview, overhead of Guidelines for Transcription handout

Students need a model of what it means to "transcribe verbatim" what they hear on a tape, particularly because this is an impossible task, as no transcription can perfectly capture all the nuances of human speech. It is important to note that there is no "natural" or "correct" way to transcribe. As the teacher, you will have to make thoughtful decisions about whether or not students should transcribe dialect, whether they should transcribe using non-traditional phonetic spellings (ex: gotta), and whether they should eliminate verbal tics such as "you know" or "like."

A mini-lesson in transcribing, supplemented by a Guidelines for Transcription handout (p. 111), is a quick way to get across the major points. This is also a good way to convince students to set aside enough time to do their own transcribing, because they'll see how long it takes you.

Ask, "What is a transcription of an interview? How is it created?"

Play the beginning of a class interview aloud, transcribing it onto an overhead projector or butcher paper. Narrate your process: Explain the heading. Point out how you must stop many times, how you rewind to listen to confusing parts over again, and any editorial changes you make. Draw students' attention to your use of punctuation to shape spoken language into a readable transcript. When you've finished the section, play it back from the beginning to check it one more time. You may want to purposely leave a few errors for students to catch on this final edit.

Show and briefly review Guidelines for Transcription. Explain that this will be in their home interview packets. As you begin to receive student transcriptions it may become necessary for you to review some of the guidelines.

Using the Home Interviews in Class

Students who have already completed their interviews usually have valuable insights for students who have yet to do theirs. With classes who were actively completing home interviews, I liked to spend a few minutes at the beginning of the class hearing about their experiences and adding their insights to a tip sheet on butcher paper. You might also consider having students work in groups to support each other as they work their way through the process of conducting their own interviews. Although it may be more complicated than focusing only on the shared texts of whole-class interviews, it also makes sense to try to include students' individual interviews in your final project.

Evaluation

I developed an evaluation sheet (p. 114) for home interviews, which you can change to suit your needs. I developed this after reading, listening to, and grading over one hundred student interviews. I wish I'd had it before I started, to share with the students as they began to prepare for their interviews. As they become skilled oral historians, I would also like to involve students in the process of designing the rubric for a successful interview. You could have students evaluate each other's interviews, using a collectively designed rubric. I think it is also valuable to assign a one page narrative reflection on the interview process, due within a week of completing the interview.

Activities to Refine Interviewing Skills

Debriefing
Perhaps the simplest way to help students refine their interviewing skills is to make time to debrief after each interview. Just try asking the class, "How did it go?" Students will often surprise you with their ability to critically evaluate their work as interviewers.

Compare and Contrast
Looking at interviews done by different classes with the same interviewees can yield valuable insights into the ways in which our questions shape the interview. Classes studying oral history can swap and critique each other's transcribed interviews, even if they're not with the same people.

Missed Opportunities
This activity is designed for use when students have access to a transcription, even a partial one, of one of their group interviews. It can also be done with our sample interviews, or with past student interviews, or with published oral histories. The teacher hands out copies of a section of transcript. Using the first page on an overhead, the teacher models reading the transcript for missed opportunities—places where a follow-up question could have been asked. Write in the follow-up questions. This can be extended into a writing activity to help students work in voices other than their own and write natural-sounding speech, where they imagine the answers to the follow-up questions, writing in the voice of the interviewee, imitating their spoken language. You could also role-play this, with students taking on the role of the interviewee to answer the unasked follow-up questions.

Follow Ups Only
See teacher Bryce Bernard's' description of this simple and successful activity in his interview—page 48.

Round Robin Follow-Up Question Exercise
Students work in groups of six or seven. One student begins to tell a story from his or her own life. Next, another student will ask a follow-up question. Each student in turn will ask a follow-up question of the original storyteller. The object is to keep the story going—and sometimes to see where it might lead, five follow-up questions later. This activity is excellent for practicing active listening, practicing follow-up questions, and helping students to think about how questions shape an interview.

The Oral History Question Exercise
Especially at the beginning, we emphasized the difference between oral history questions and journalistic questions. We did this by having students interview one of us, either the classroom teacher or the oral historian. If the question seemed to be a journalistic question we would give a generally uncooperative, sometimes catchy but always unsatisfying answer. (For instance, "Do you like teaching?" "I love teaching!") With an oral history question, we would give a more engaging usually anecdotal answer ("Is there anything that happened to you when you were young that made you want to become a

teacher?" "Yes, my favorite teacher, Mr. So and So...")

We would also ask the class after each question to tell us what kind of question they had just asked. On a large sheet of paper, taped to the wall at the front of the room, one of us would then write down the question under the heading Oral History Question or Journalistic Question once the class had provided the correct answer. We kept this sheet of paper up at the front of the room for the duration of the program.

Oral History Field Trips

It's not surprising that when we asked students to review their experiences with the Telling Lives Curriculum many cited the field trips as their favorite part. One of the goals of our project was to bring the outside world into the classroom (see Beyond the Classroom, page 40). Of course we also took every opportunity to use the outside world as a classroom.

We took two kinds of trips: trips to conduct interviews and museum trips. Students did interviews at the police precinct, the senior center, the American Legion, and the youth center. At places like these we were usually able to arrange for several interviewees to be available so that students could conduct their interviews in smaller groups. One class went all the way to Harlem to interview Rosalie Long at Abyssinian Baptist Church. (You can read her transcript starting on page 65).

Every class visited the Museum of Chinese in the Americas, our partner in creating their final exhibits, to look at other student-curated exhibits and to learn about how museums use oral history, specifically how this dialogic community museum uses it. The museum staff helped them to look at the exhibits and think about how they had been created, beginning to walk them through the process they'd be experiencing in the weeks to come.

Many of the students also got to go to Ellis Island, where they sat in the oral history listening room listening to oral histories from the Ellis Island Oral History Project. The students relished their assignment: to critique the interviews. They saw how their work as oral historians was virtually identical to the work of these professional adult interviewers whose voices they heard in this bright, high-tech museum. Every museum trip was based around the question: "What do you want your exhibit to be like?" For the Ellis Island trip assignment sheet, see page 122.

Edited Sample Interview with James Macklin:

Student: Today is March 9, 2004, this class is 707.

Student: What is your name?

Macklin: James Macklin.

Student: Where, when and what year were you born?

Macklin: I was born in Lawrenceville, Virginia, December 9, 1939.

Student: Can you tell me something about your childhood?

Macklin: Yes, quite a bit. I was born in a part of Virginia that wasn't very affluent. There wasn't much going on. You probably could go through the town in about five minutes. There was only one red light. My mother was only fourteen years old when I was born. And so my mother and grandmother, both at the same time were having a child. So it left me in a difficult situation, but there was a lady that my mother had befriended—that my grandmother had befriended over the years—and she had never raised a child and she had a desire to raise a little old boy like me. My grandmother welcomed the idea, because of my mother being so young. My stepmother was a brilliant lady. And there, in nine years she instilled quite a bit of wisdom into my life Unfortunately, at the age of nine, she had a brain tumor and she passed away. It left me in quite bad shape. And from there I lost contact with my immediate family and wound up in a lot of different foster homes. Some were good, some were not so good. And I grew up sort of with a chip on my shoulder. I don't have it today. I outgrew it. I'm back with my mother, who will be seventy-nine on March 19. We are the best of friends. A lot of pain, a lot of forgiveness, but today my mother is my best friend. Is that all right? Yes, sir?

Student: Have you had any encounter with the Klan [Ku Klux Klan]?

Macklin: No, but I've been called out of my names quite a few times other than who I am, you know what I mean? That was a natural thing in that part of the country. Let me show you one incident. When I first came to New York, I went to Buffalo. I thought that the race issue was a big issue in Virginia, but in Virginia and parts of the South where there were those little signs hanging around talking about "Colored Only", whatever that meant. You really knew the bathroom you were supposed to go into, or wherever you were supposed to have been. But I went to Buffalo, New York, when I was about eighteen years old and I stopped in this place and when having a drink, and every time this guy would serve me, he would break my glass. Bing! So, it was funny to me, because if you were foolish enough to break up all your glasses because I drank out of them, something is wrong with you. So my friend and I just continued to let him break his glasses. But I found out that the race issue was more powerful in the North and more subtle than it was in the South

Student: My teachers told me that you have HIV.

Macklin: I do, sir. Don't I look pretty good?

Student: Yes. How did you get it?

Macklin: [Laughs] Good question. Okay, when I came from the South at a very early age, running away from home, I was determined not to live in an area where there was no lights. I wanted to be where all the bright lights were, and so I came to New Jersey. At about twenty years old, I had a very successful business. Fortunately I made a lot of money. But I never had a childhood. I never played with toys. If you would give me a bicycle today and say, "James, ride it," I'd break my neck before I got across the street. You know what I mean? So after I made a lot of money, my toys became big things. Automobiles, fine clothes, a nice home. You know what I mean? So later in life, I said, "Well, what else is there to do besides have money, clothes, a lot of girls, fine times? There has to be something else to life." So what I began to do was look for love in all the wrong places, and I got into the drug business, okay? So now I have two businesses. I have a cleaning business and I have a drug business. But unfortunately, by looking for love in the wrong places, I chose the things that weren't really good for a person. Then I started hanging out, spending money and having a good time and living loose, you know? Then I went as far as to do drugs with the needles, okay. About twelve years ago, I was diagnosed with this disease. Now don't you for one moment feel sorry for me. As you can see, I'm doing very well and I'm doing very good. I have not been to a hospital. I've never been missed a day's work. I take a few little pills everyday, okay? I do a lot of exercise. I eat a lot of sweets, as you can see. I'm a little plump. But other than that, at this particular point in my life—and I'm sixty-four years old— they cannot find that thing called HIV in my blood. It's undetectable. However, I will never stop taking the medicine until my doctor tells me. As far as I'm concerned, there has been a cure for me. Don't I look pretty good? I don't look sick, do I?

Student: Why did you sharecrop? Why did you start to sharecrop?

Macklin: Why, oh, well, that was a long time ago. When I was born, there were a lot of things going on in the South. There were some African Americans who owned their own property, and there were some who didn't. There were some who had to do the next best thing. They would work on the farm. Actually they really didn't get too much for working on the farm.

I remember as a little boy, after my stepmother died, I remember working on the farm for a year. I think I got one pair of shoes at the end of the year. You wouldn't understand that today. You see? One pair of shoes in the whole year's time. Because most of the time during the summer in that part of the country, during that period in time you would go barefooted most of the time in the summer. So you really didn't need shoes, you only needed shoes when you were going to some social event or something like that. I

remember being on a farm with a fellow, and his kids used to go to school. And guess what? I wasn't able to go to school because I had to stay and help with the tobacco crop.

Student: What kind of stuff were you growing when you were young?

Macklin: Oh, tobacco, cotton, cows and all kind of, everything. Oh man, corn, peanuts and everything. You know what I mean?

Student: Did you ever go back to school?

Macklin: No, I didn't. You know what I did? I learned a lot and I studied a lot on my own. I sort of taught myself after that, and I'm still teaching myself today because you're never too old to learn. I want to encourage you, because the opportunities are open for you. You know, aim for the moon and if you happen to miss you might just land on a star. Me, I had to dig deep and use a lot of wit to survive, and I've done a very good job of it.

I even became homeless one time in the City of New York for approximately eight months. And it wasn't because of a lack of education, it was making bad choices, okay? And then I used to sleep on the subway trains. I don't look like it today, do I? I knew when I was on that subway that that was not my life, and this was not what I was all about. But I got stuck. I got stuck into the drug trade. After losing everything I got stuck there, so I figured I'd run away, and who cares, man! You know you've gotten older in life and what difference does it make?

While I was sleeping on the subway at about two thirty in the morning, a lady woke me up. She said to me, "What are you doing in this kind of condition?" Number one, for a lady at two thirty in the morning to wake a man up on the train, you wonder what was her thinking, you know what I mean? Bothering a homeless man at two thirty in the morning. But this lady obviously looked beyond all of my dirt and unkempt self, and saw a human being that didn't deserve the way he was living. She introduced me to a little place up the street that's called the Bowery Mission in 1987, December 28. I went there and what you see is what you get.

Student: Are you still in touch with the lady who —

Macklin: —who woke me up on the train?

Student: Are you still in touch with her?

Macklin: No. Prior to 1987, I would not have come here to be with you, okay? You know why? I didn't have a love for people. In other words, if you didn't look like me, you know what I mean? You can understand where I'm coming from, right? If you didn't look like me, you weren't my complexion, your hair wasn't wooly-wooly, then I didn't have many places for you other than you pay me if I did a job for you. But the interesting thing that happened that morning at two thirty, this lady that woke me up was

actually a white lady. You see what I'm saying? What she really done was more than take me, help me get out of homelessness, rearranged my thinking and caused me to begin to look at people in a different way.

She brought me a message of hope, and love, and encouraged me to get out of my condition. I did just that. I accepted her advice. Now in total answering your question, by *not* telling me her name, she didn't look for a plaque on the wall for the good deed she had done

Student: How did you get into the subway?

Macklin: What?

Student: How did you have money to get into the subway?

Macklin: As you can see, I'm a very charming little fellow. Even to be my age, I'm sort of charming, all right? All right? All right? [Students say yes]

So when I was homeless, I always kept myself—I look pretty neat, right? I was doing pretty bad, but I would always find a place to take a shower. I'd always find a place to kind of powder my skin up a little bit, put on a little deodorant, so that I could be around people. Homeless people are some of the most intelligent people in the world. Did you know that? Do you know that you can't be stupid and be homeless? Some of those guys have been out there for a long time, and they have survived by wit. How they do it, I do not know, because those eight months I lived out there were the most miserable eight months I ever had in my life.

Teacher: Tell us a story about when you were homeless.

Macklin: I used to ride the subway, then I used to hang out with the homeless, and wow, man, some of these guys were in bad shape. Some of these guys were living underground. They were called mole people. They lived down there so long if they were dark as that jacket, they'd be light as that paper on the wall, because of not coming out to the sunlight, and there's a lot of them still living down there today under the subway stations. They got their own apartments down there. They got their own television and cooking utensils. When the grocery stores used to give out food, I found myself—you know, like they bring the big bins that are sometimes sitting in front of the grocery stores, they'd be getting rid of stuff that's been there a long time or whatever. I would get a supermarket cart, and I would take this food down underground for the guys. So even when I was hurting myself, there was a place in me that was saying, "Still reach out to somebody else. Try to help somebody else." So, [laughs] do I regret being homeless? No. Now that sounds pretty foolish, doesn't it? Being homeless and being in that condition was a humbling experience. Had it not been for that road, you might not of ever met me today, okay? Because the way I think today is nothing like I thought prior to 1987. You would not have poured me in here in a cement mixing truck.

You started these questions. You ought to have something else to say, you know? If it hadn't been for you, I wouldn't have gotten this far. You started these things, you wanted to know who I was and now you have nothing to say?

Student: Do you believe in God?

Macklin: Oh boy! Do I believe in God? Yes, I do I am a serious believer in God. But, you know something? I don't believe he sits somewhere in some far distant place. I believe that you can touch him and feel him daily. I see little Gods in here. When I see you with these beautiful faces, I'm looking in the very face of God

Student: So what did you want to be when you were little?

Macklin: Where's that guitar? I wanted to be a singer.

Students: Sing for us!

Macklin: Here's a song about some of the things that I went through.

I said they call it stormy Monday, baby
But Tuesday's just as bad
I said that they call it stormy Monday, baby
But Tuesday's just as bad
Saturday night I go out to play
Then on Sunday I go to church

I like this part of this thing, it says,

I said Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy on me

Whew

I cried Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy on me

You see that I'm trying to find my baby
Please bring her home back to me

Teacher: Mr. Macklin, I think they'd probably like to hear you sing one more song.

Macklin: Oh my goodness

I'm goin' to Kansas City
Kansas City here I come

They got some pretty little women there
And I'm gonna get me one

I'm gonna stand on the corner
At twelfth street and vine
I'm gonna stand on the corner
At twelfth street and vine

With my Kansas City baby
And a bottle of Kansas City wine

APPLAUSE

Chapter Four:
What Do I Do With the Interviews?

Having a final product adds a tremendous amount of social and learning value to an oral history project. It is the creation of these final products—from archives to books to performances—with which this chapter is concerned. It also includes a profile of interviewee Nettie Gragnano and an interview with Rameen Moshref, an Afghan American who tells stories about growing up in Kabul, the Soviet Invasion, escaping to Pakistan on a donkey, and his life in the United States, particularly after September 11th, 2001.

I think oral history is important because you could show the world something. For example – racism. If people see the exhibit they might think, "Racism is horrible," so then it may change.

--Lily, 8th grader, MS 131

Activities for Processing the Interviews:

We have developed a variety of creative and analytical - and creatively analytical - activities to use with students after an interview to help them make sense of what they heard and improve their interviewing. We've had the whole class engage in one activity or allowed them to work in groups or alone and choose between a few. Most of these activities are designed to build toward the work of creating final products.

Living through history timeline
From the beginning of the program we had a timeline—a length of thick string that was hung from one corner of the room to the other. On the topside of the timeline, attached by clothespins, were illustrations and descriptions of historic events. After each interview we asked students to indicate where that person's life intersected with history and to attach a card with the interviewee's name to the bottom side of the timeline (which was reserved for individuals). If you begin to work with student stories, exploring how they've lived through history, they can add themselves to the timeline.

The timeline can take other forms. We've drawn one on the board, and we've had students draw them. A lesson pointing out how our interviewees have lived through history, illustrated by a timeline, is an excellent companion to the peer interview lesson Our first exhibit, called Living Through History, was organized around a timeline that brought together interviewee stories, student stories, major events in world and local history, and life stories posted by museum visitors.

Retell the interviewee's life story
The students take turns telling a piece of the interviewee's life story, working together to tell the story in its entirety in chronological order. The students must tell their part in first person, as though they are the interviewee. For example, Kim stands up and says, "My name is Don Kao and I was born in Maryland in 1952." After a minute it's Sammy's turn, and he continues, "My most vivid memory about school was my first day. The school was…." This activity helps students with sequencing, empathy, comprehension, paraphrasing, accountable listening, and finding holes in the story.

Create scenes, or skits, based on the interviewee's life story
In small groups, the students select a favorite story and re-enact it based on the interview. Dialogue is improvised but based on the interview. Debrief why students chose those scenes and what artistic choices they made in their portrayal. What did creating a scene make them realize about the interviewee's life? What follow-up questions did students realize they should have asked?

Cooperative drawing
Working in small groups or pairs, students draw pictures from the life of the interviewee. One student is the artist and the other students direct him or her.

Watercolor workshop (supplied by MS 131 English teacher Marianne Gavin)
An oral history interview should be vivid. Students should be left with "burning images" in their minds after they've listened to a life story. Before a watercolor workshop, we give students time to picture their burning images. With paints and heavy paper, students paint their images. The only instruction they're given is to fill the paper with color, leaving little or no blank spots. We might do the brainstorming part of the assignment for homework or in a period before the painting, so students can have an entire period to work. When the work is completed, students love to circulate around the room, looking at each other's work, noticing how their peers made sense out of the interview they all heard in different ways. You can ask them to write about their work. This lesson can be built on other work on symbolism, use of color to create mood, or visual literacy.

Thank you notes
We always have students write thank you notes to the interviewee. The entire class can write one together, or students can work in groups or individually to write the letters. We have connected this to drawing or painting activities by having students make cards instead of just letters. It can be a good idea to save copies of the letters, as they can be used in creating final products.

Travel guides
Bryce Bernards and Taylor Connolly used the travel guide genre as a medium to allow students to present and synthesize their work. Their students are creating travel guides to the lives of their interviewees, mapping their lives and their memories.

Interviewee Profile: Nettie Gragnano

We met eighty-year-old Nettie Gragnano at her church, where her priest recommended her as a born storyteller. She grew up in Chinatown when it was Little Italy, and told one 8th grade class vivid stories about her childhood in the tenements of Baxter Street. Here are two:

Student: Can I ask, do you remember your younger sisters being born? What was it like?

Gragnano: I remember the last one that died. Her name was Dolores, and I remember my mother, when she was pregnant, I remember that one that was the only one. When my youngest sister died, she was coming home from school, and there was an oil company around the corner on Mulberry Street and she crossed between the cars, and he backed up, he never saw her. He didn't go over her or anything, but the way she fell, she hit her head and she died instantly. Yes, but he never touched her, she didn't have a bruise on her body. So that I remember very vividly. And in those days they used to bury their—they used to have the wakes in the house, I don't know if—remember that? And I, that's why it's still with me. I can't imagine how they got up with that big casket, you know, getting up all the way up to the top floor and bringing it down. And she died Easter Week, which would be—yesterday was her anniversary—so they didn't bury them. You had to keep them the whole week, and she was a whole week in the house. Imagine? It was an impression, that I—not good for the children. Which meant we never went to sleep. People—the neighbors would come in all day long and bring us food and something to eat, because my mother was distraught, she had a nervous breakdown. But people were helping us and there was this casket, all night, you never went to bed, you sat in the chair for one full week.

****

Student: Did you believe in Santa Claus and Tooth Fairies and —

Gragnano: —well, we didn't have a tooth fairy in those days, but I did believe in Santa Claus, and I didn't get much for Christmas. My mother used to give me and my two sisters a quarter each and she'd say, "Go and do your Christmas shopping." [Students laugh] Do you remember the Woolworth, the five and ten? Yes? I used to go there and try to buy presents. How could you buy presents for a quarter, for a whole family? Let me tell you—so when I was telling my husband that, he said, "You got a quarter?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I got an orange." [Rambunctious laughter]. The first time I told him me and my three sisters slept four in a bed, I could still remember this, I said—I couldn't wait to get married, because we were going to have my own bedroom now. So I said, "You know, it's so tough growing up with three sisters and you sleep four in a bed." And he said, "You were lucky, I slept on a trunk." [Laughter] His mother used to put all the blankets on and he slept on a trunk, because there were a lot of kids in his family. We were so poor, it wasn't funny, and nobody knew you were poor.

The students loved her stories, and decided to focus their book entirely on her. They wrote and illustrated comic books with titles like *Nettie's Big Sins* and *The Gragnano Sisters, Poor but Happy.*

Creating Final Products

A Note On Editing Transcripts

How to edit an oral history transcript to make it as readable and engaging as possible while still retaining the orality and flavor of the interview is a topic of great debate among oral historians. If you and your students are using oral history transcripts in your final product it is a question you will have to ask yourselves. In this curriculum guide, we have modeled a few different styles of editing transcripts. We've used brief excerpts of interviews in Shui Mak Kah's stories of the Japanese Invasion, featured in The Art of the Interview, Part 1, and the Interviewee Profiles. The sample interviews at the end of each chapter have been edited for use in this guide. We took out parts of the interviews that were less interesting, streamlined the interviewee's syntax for increased readability, and sometimes reorganized the interview to improve the flow. You will notice that we did leave in the questions, because we believe that it is important for the reader to see the questions to which the interviewee is responding, to not read with the illusion that the interviewee is just telling their story alone. Of course, the interviews are much more useful as tools for teaching oral history with the questions left in.

In Rameen Moshref's interview we divided the interview into titled sections such as "Women in Afghanistan" and "Soviet Invasion." This is a way to make an interview more readable without changing it much at all. We used this same technique in the interview with teacher Al Guerriero, although in his we took out the questions. In the interview with Bryce Bernards we tried to create handles for the reader by putting essential words and phrases in bold type. How do you read these different kinds of edited transcripts? When you're reading interviews with people who speak English as a second language, like Josephine Prins or Rameen Moshref, you'll notice that we did not standardize their usage. What are the pros and cons of this decision?

Oral History Books

To introduce the idea of oral history books, we brought in a varied selection of oral history books, both professionally produced and produced by students of all ages. In groups, students were given time to look at the books and make notes on what they liked and did not like about each book. As a class, we made lists of what we liked and didn't like about oral history books. This list was useful in helping us to keep our audience in mind later on, as we designed our own books.

There are infinite ways to put together a book, magazine, booklet or zine based on oral history interviews with students. We will share with you our model and some ideas for other options. In four of our classes, we used a similar process. As the interviewing phase of the project neared completion, we began to have discussions with the students around common themes in the interviews that interested them. One class, for example, saw a common theme of discrimination running throughout their interviews. Another decided to focus on interviews that addressed their essential questions: "Where is home?" and "What is freedom?" Two other classes decided to focus entire books on the lives of an interviewee whose story particularly interested them. Once the class had a theme, we talked about how a book on that theme, using their interviews, might be broken up into

chapters. Groups of students chose chapters to work on. Each group got a book chapter planning sheet (page 123) to help them plan their work. With copies of the transcripts and their artwork and photography in hand the class was given four class sessions to create their chapters. We were lucky enough to be able to work with a graphic designer when we created our books. Students simple had to clearly note their ideas for how they wanted their pages to look. It is just as practical to have students cut, paste, and draw to lay out their own pages.

In other classes students went through the same process of deciding on a theme and the general outline for the content of their books, but they worked in teams based around tasks such as text editing, photo editing, and art editing. Students chose the transcript excerpts, photos, artwork, and student writing that they wanted to include in the books, and the teacher organized the content by interviewee. Al Guerriero's class, with their book *History: Shadows and Dreams*, worked this way. Another class created *Freedomland*, a book about civil rights and freedom.

One class had the unique experience of working with a professional comic book artist to create a graphic novel based on the life of their favorite interviewee, Nettie Gragnano. In that class, each group chose a story and devised their own way of working together to script, draft, draw and color their chapter. The graphic designer was able to integrate their work with scanned family photos and artifacts borrowed from Mrs. Gragnano.

Our books were designed to be mass produced so that every student would have a copy of the class book to keep. Another option is to create one of a kind books that remain in the classroom or are donated to a local library or museum. We created one book like this, in which we pasted original student watercolors, print outs of thematically linked digital photographs, and student memoirs inspired by the oral history process.

One thing that is essential to consider when creating books using student work and oral history transcripts is the question of legal releases. Make sure to double check that you have the releases on file for any interviews you use in publication. If your publication is going beyond the classroom in any way, you MUST have signed releases from students and their parents to use student work. There is a sample student work release on page 112.

Video

For a description of our video project, please see DCTV in the Partnering With Outside Organizations section, page 63.

Performance

Performance wasn't central to our final products, although it was central to our curriculum. Even the small amount of public performing that students did—reading their work at the exhibit opening—had a powerful impact on the students who participated. Oral history and theater are a natural combination. An oral history project can and often does end in performance. A storytelling performance or a more polished play is a low cost yet effective way to present the stories students have collected, and it preserves the

original orality of the interview. Performance is also an opportunity for interdisciplinary collaboration (for instance, a social studies teacher might collaborate with a drama teacher).

Exhibit

Because we worked with 250 students, we weren't able to involve them as intensively in the exhibit design and production as we would have liked. Stacey Fell-Eisenkraft, in another, smaller collaboration between Middle School 131 and MoCA, was able to include her students in this process and they created a beautiful exhibit called *Many True Stories: Life in Chinatown On and After September 11*.

In each class, in connection with visits to MoCA, the exhibit space, or Ellis Island, we did an exercise where students brainstormed about their "Dream Museum," writing about or drawing pictures of it, and then sharing their ideas in a class discussion. We were able to share these ideas with the designers at MoCA, and include quite a number of them in the final exhibit. Inspired by their visions, Gerry actually created a diorama of his classes' dream museum, and we made that part of the exhibit, too.

To begin the exhibit design process we reviewed the best work the students had done and categorized it according to seven themes: 9/11, garment workers, crime, neighborhood stories, stories about China, civil rights stories, and immigration stories. We brought together photographs, transcripts, writing, artwork, audio, and artifacts for each section and turned the materials over to the museum staff. Their gifted designer, Michael Hew Wing, worked with Cynthia Lee to envision the physical space. Cynthia did all of the graphic design, Michael did the fabrication, and a team of staff and volunteers built the exhibit over the course of three busy days. The cost for materials was about $1000, and the labor was a part of our funded collaboration.

Bryce Bernards and Taylor Connolly are experimenting with creating a museum exhibit on a much more modest scale as the final product of their oral history unit this year. Working with the art teacher in their school, their students will be creating an exhibit for the school library.

Radio

Radio and oral history are obviously suited for use together. One offshoot of our project was a small program in which two students had the opportunity to work intensively with a radio producer from *The World*, a joint presentation of BBC radio and Public Radio International, and a freelance producer from National Public Radio.

It would be a challenge to do a high-quality radio project in the classroom without access to a computer lab equipped with audio editing software. It is possible to teach the idea of audio editing using very simple technology: students can record onto one tape recorder, decide what they want to use and in what order, and make their edited piece by playing the audio they want, in the order they want it, aloud and use a microphone to record it onto a "master" tape. For more on this process, see 10 East Ways to Use Technology in the English Classroom, by Hilve Firek (Heinemann, 2003). With access to a computer

lab and audio software, you could include a higher quality audio or radio component in your oral history project. You could also partner with another teacher in your school to offer a class, club, or after-school program in radio production linked to your oral history project.

Archive

The value of an oral history project, both pedagogically and in a larger social sense, is greatly enhanced if the interviews and final products are archived for future use. The students' awareness that their work would be useful to future historians and students was part of what turned this classroom project into an authentic learning experience. I can remember a student coming in to class after interviewing his grandmother about old Chinatown, bursting to tell me that he "had one that the museum would want." The archive can be online or physical, it can include tapes, transcripts, and student work, and it can be in the school library or the Library of Congress. It all depends on your goals and your means.

We archived our interviews in several ways. All of the classroom interviews have been archived in the Oral History Research Office Collection, according to our normal procedures for archiving (www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/oral/interviewing.html). Through our collaboration with the Museum of Chinese in the Americas were able to contribute some of the students' work to their innovative Mapping Our Heritage Project (www.moca-nyc.org/MoCA/content.asp?cid=18), which uses a 3D virtual map of Chinatown as a unique place-based finding tool for their collections. Selected interviews have also been archived in their traditional archive. We've made arrangements with the librarian at Middle School 131 to archive the students' interviews there and to make them known to Social Studies teachers preparing students for document-based questions on standardized tests.

Check with your school library, local public library, local museums or college libraries to see if they are interested in housing your collection. The veteran's history project accepts student interviews (www.loc.gov/folklife/vets/). A collaboration with another teacher could yield an online home for your project.

Different kinds of archives may have different requirements for submissions. Most are happier with full transcriptions, as they are easier for researchers to access. An abstract is another helpful addition. Another option, which can go far in making the interviews useful to future users, is to make a time code index – a table showing in five minute segments what's on the tape.

Edited Sample Interview with Rameen Moshref:

LIVING MAP
Student: We are at Middle School 131, 807 interviewing Rameen Moshref, April 2, 2004, interview for Oral History Project.

Student: Can you tell us when and where you were born and how was your childhood?

Moshref: Oh, long story. Luckily I brought a map so that you can actually visualize all of this, and I'm not just talking blah, blah, blah, whatever. All right, can somebody hold this for me? There you go, all right. So this is Afghanistan, I was born there, and so you could see the larger map, there is China, on this end, and it's—China's our neighbor, like on the very tip of it right there, and you have India, down here, and then Pakistan, and then Iran is here, and the former Soviet Union is here. I was born here on this—my father's from here, which is one of the provinces, one of the very ancient provinces which is called Herat, and my mother is from the capital, Kabul, city girl, and I was raised there until the age of fifteen. Then because of the Soviet invasion—because there was a war and the constant bombardment of the countryside, the political climate was changing, we were forced—and I was becoming military age, so basically you go into the draft, and they take you by force, and put you into army.

AFGHANISTAN BEFORE THE WAR
So how was my childhood? Basically Afghanistan before the war was a very beautiful and natural country. It was—a stranger could knock any door and ask to stay at someone's house and they would welcome him, or her, or them with open arms. One of our traditions—being Afghans is—is hospitality. If someone doesn't want to come to our house, it's basically an insult.

But of course these days you knock on someone's door, because of the war [laughs], someone might shoot you.

Student: Can you describe your home?

Moshref: My home? Afghanistan, home, you mean my personal house, or Afghanistan?

Student: Your family.

Moshref: Let's see, we had—at points we were living with other relatives in a big house, not an apartment, it's like a house where you have a yard, and you play in the yard. They had a wall in front, so it was like this idea of inside and outside, so we sometimes went outside to play with kids. We always visited grandmas—well, my grandfathers died when I was very, very young—so I was always visiting grandmas.

Our weekend is Friday, Friday we didn't go to work, so every Thursday night to Friday we had always family over. During the late '70's, TV came to Afghanistan, so we had TV and we were watching different films and just gathering and socializing, you know

socializing with adults, and kids my age. I have cousins who were younger than me that I was playing with, and sometimes we went out and we played soccer. We played with kites, kites were really big and guys—if you didn't have a kite, you weren't really happening [laughs].

WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN
Student: I know that back in the old days, the women couldn't really go out without a man.

Moshref: Well, let's see, Afghanistan is a Muslim country—has been for fourteen hundred years. But it was a traditional country, not a conservative country. Traditional in the sense that people valued their traditions and their culture, and it wasn't—"Oh, you cannot do this, and you have to do this!" Like, for example, Saudi Arabia is a conservative country—they don't let women drive, you have to wear a veil, etc., etc., etc. Afghanistan was never like that. During the 1960s, women were going without the veil. Well, even before—I think it was '30s and '40s that the first unveiling of women started with the family of the royalty. And then it passed on. My grandmother was the first woman who went from home to work without a scarf, probably seventy years ago, and her name was in the newspaper. And the government was encouraging people to be just more progressive. My mom said that she was wearing mini-skirts in the '60s and '70s. And I saw her pictures. Now the Soviets invaded in 1979 and they left in '89. From 1992 there was a civil war. After '92 to '96, it was the Taliban period. Now it's this period of four years that women could not go out without a man.

IMMIGRANT STORY
Student: Do you think that America was a much better place when you came?

Moshref: No, I particularly didn't—I was very young. Afghanistan was something that I was used to—even if they were taking me to heaven, I would still miss my country, you know, because that's where I grew up Coming here as a young person and trying to first learn the language, and then fit in—I definitely didn't fit in at the beginning, because [laughs] I didn't know what people were doing, you know. I didn't know this culture, I didn't know how things worked, I definitely didn't have many friends in high school—only my friends who were Afghans, because we knew each other's culture, we knew each other's language, and we knew how friendship worked. You know, it's like I was afraid to eat certain foods because I didn't know if they were pork—because we didn't eat pork—or what was in them. I was in Afghanistan for fifteen years, and then like nineteen years here. So most of my life I was here. So I grew accustomed to life here.

SOVIET INVASION
Teacher: I want to go back to when the Soviets invaded —

Moshref: Well, getting back to my map again, [opens map] —there was the Soviet Union all the way here, you see the big pink blob that says the U.S.S.R. And they wanted to have a warm water port so from there they could attack anywhere. That's why they had influenced some political parties in Afghanistan. So some of the people—with the

help of the Soviet Union—took power in Afghanistan in 1978. Because their numbers were so low—it was a country of eighteen million people, and a hundred thousand people took over, okay? So that's not enough people to control a country. So they had to ask for more help to come, soldiers to put down the uprisings. That's why they told the Soviets to come.

And that night when the Soviets came and it was in the middle of the night, they poured in. First of all, they took over the Presidential Palace. They just came by planes, so every minute I think, a big plane would come with tanks and everything.

So when we woke up in the morning, on every intersection there were Soviets trying to keep people calm, and people were just "wow!" You know, seeing all this military now, and imagine not having seen any tanks before—especially boys liked it. I don't know, I loved it, just seeing the tanks and all these weapons, and I would just go close to the tanks and, "Wow, it's fascinating!" I didn't know we were being invaded, I just thought it was cool seeing a tank. And the people were shooting and we were taking the spent shells, you know, that come out of the rifle? We used to collect those and kind of trade them just like cards here, baseball cards. So we were just trading them, and within a year or two, we knew every kind of weapon. We could actually tell when they were firing which weapon it was.

I saw a lot of fighting and war—I was young, I was your age—I was caught in the crossfire. People are falling around you, and these bombs and artillery shells are hitting you. I was witness to certain things, and I saw villages that were really bombarded, they were like flat—in a pile of rubble. And I saw people's graves right in front of their houses. I'll never forget this, I was a child when I saw that. Violence in general is not cool. I mean it'll change you [laughs] very fast. We had this mentality that we may not live tomorrow, because shells were coming in from places, you know the rockets were coming in and hitting – boom! Let's just say we had September 11th every day, or every other day.

SEPTEMBER 11
Student: After 9/11, have you ever experienced racism?

Moshref: 9/11? Out on the streets, I mean people really can't tell if I'm Spanish, or if I'm Afghan. There are not that many Afghans, people don't really see me and say, "okay, that's an Afghan." But Afghan stores, yes, they were boycotted, some stones thrown at them, one was set ablaze and the guy there was really burned or died. When I go out of the country, when I come back, my passport says born in Afghanistan, they give me an extra hard time. "Who paid for your trip?" "What do you mean who paid for my trip? Al-Qaeda?" [laughs]. You know what I mean? That's a ridiculous question to ask. Do you ask this of other people? "What was your purpose in going to Germany?" I mean even if I was a terrorist, would I say, "Oh yes, I'm a terrorist." And it's just makes you feel bad, it just makes you feel as if you are not part of this society.

APPENDIX

In this appendix you'll find copies of all the forms, worksheets, and rubrics we developed in the course of this work, as well as sample curricula composed of the lessons in this guide and a sample (successful) grant proposal.

Ruby, 8th grader at MS 131:

I learned that history from the past is still important to the people who have been though it.

Interviewing Tips for Doing Your Own Oral History

by Middle School 131's Class 809

June 2004

- ✓ First, find an interviewee
- ✓ Get some questions ready before you start
- ✓ Second, go somewhere quiet
- ✓ Make sure you have enough time to interview the person because it might go over an hour
- ✓ Make sure that you've got everything with you – recorder, blank discs, batteries, questions, and a release form.
- ✓ Third, ask them if it's okay to let other people hear your interview
- ✓ Say where and when the interview takes place
- ✓ Fourth, ask them - "Can you tell me your name, where and when you were born, and a little about your family?"
- ✓ Don't ask too many specific questions in the beginning
- ✓ Ask open-ended questions - don't ask yes or no questions
- ✓ Ask detailed questions
- ✓ Don't go to another topic when you didn't finish the first one
- ✓ Speak clearly and loudly
- ✓ Be polite
- ✓ Be confident
- ✓ Think before you ask
- ✓ Don't go "Uh" or "Ah" or anything like that
- ✓ Listen to the interviewees carefully because you might think of another good question on the part he/she talks about
- ✓ Don't touch the microphone or fiddle with it!

Sample Eighteen Session Telling Lives Curriculum

- ✓ Each session is 1.5 hours long
- ✓ This does not include time for basic scaffolding activities not directly related to oral history, in-depth background research, or extended writers' workshops. Our students

did oral history two sessions a week. Students did other work with their classroom teachers in the periods in between, some of which supported the oral history (for example, extensive thematically linked reading, or mini-lessons on editing a transcript or writing from different perspectives) and some of which was separate. This part-time arrangement worked for us, because it gave us time to arrange interviews and get them transcribed and kept kids from burning out.

- ✓ This sample is built around a modest book as the final product – maybe one page per kid, laid out by kids, and photocopied.

- ✓ We would sign out recorders for at-home interviews to a few kids each session, starting with session #5 and continuing through to the very end.

- ✓ Each day includes a homework assignment. Many of these assignments are designed to build a collection of oral-history based drafts from which a student can draw when they begin to work on the final product. These could just as easily be Do Now's.

- ✓ All of the lessons and mini lessons listed here can be found in this guide.

1	Intro to Oral History Lesson Plan *HW: Collect and write down a story*.
2	First Guided Practice Interview Oral History Question Activity *HW: Write 5 oral history follow-up questions you would have liked to ask today.*
3	Photography Workshop **Introduce Home Interview Project** Interview Prep.: Brainstorming Questions in Groups based on teacher-supplied bio *HW: Start home interview planning sheet*
4	Interview HW: One page free write on today's interview – NOT a summary. Finish home interview planning sheets
5	Processing: Follow-ups Only Lesson Transcribing Mini-Lesson Interview Prep: Short, thematically related readings **Home Interview Planning Sheets Due – Start Home Interviews** *HW: What do you want to learn from tomorrow's interview? How will you find out?*
6	Interview *HW: Write a reflection based on today's interview. Address both the content and the technique.*
7	Processing: Skits Interview Prep: Group work on planning interview questions based on bios and teacher-supplied readings *HW: Interview Prep: Short thematically-related reading, write three questions*

8	Interviewing trip to senior center, American Legion, etc.… for small group interviews *HW: In writing, re tell the best story you heard today, from any perspective.*
9	Storyteller performance *HW: How could you use some of the techniques of our storyteller to vividly and creatively tell one of the stories we've heard?*
10	Processing: Skits based on session #8 interviews, inspired by storyteller performance *HW: How have you lived though history?*
11	Peer Interviews/Living Through History Lesson Plan Interview Prep.: Teacher supplies brief verbal bio, class briefly discusses possible questions, themes and approaches. *HW: Write a story from the perspective of your peer interviewee.*
12	Interview *HW: What is the most vivid, or burning, image from today's interview?*
13	Processing: Watercolor workshop *HW: If we made a book out of our interviews, what would it be about?*
14	Oral History Book Genre Study Activity, Whole Class Book Planning, Begin Group Work *HW: Begin revising one of your draft pieces for the book.*
15	Book Group Work *HW: Continue work on your book contributions.*
16	Book Group Work *HW: Continue work on your book contributions*
17	Final Editing and Compilation of Book, Party Planning *HW: Invite your home interviewee to our book release party.*
18	Book Publication Party with Interviewees, Administrators, etc.…

Sample One Week Curricula

These are models for how you could teach oral history intensively during one week of instruction in an English or History class, grades 6-12. This assumes a double period each day, although the activities could be edited to work in a 45 minute period. You could of course use these outlines but extend them over a longer period of time, in which case it would be more likely that you would be able to work with transcribed interviews.

English Unit Question: What is Oral History? Why is it Important or Unimportant?

Day 1: Intro to Oral History Lesson Plan
Homework: Collect a story from someone in your family.
Day 2: Interview with a Great Storyteller (focus on eliciting vivid stories with visual details)
Homework: Write a short, informal response to today's interview.
Day 3: Debriefing from interview through short writing and/or acting activities. Discussion of unit questions.
Homework: Write down a story from your own life
Day 4: Peer Interviews
Homework: Write an anecdote from the life of your interviewee.
Day 5: Watercolor Workshop. Return to unit questions.
Final Products:
Public: Create a bulletin board displaying student watercolors, captioned with quotes from interviewees (students and guests)[3].
Individual: Students could polish either a creative piece from the point of view of someone they interviewed, a piece about a story from their own life, inspired by the interviews, or an essay posing an answer to the unit questions.

History Unit Questions: What is Oral History? What Does it Teach us About History, Both as a Discipline and in Terms of Content?

Day 1: Introduction to Oral History Lesson Plan
Homework: Ask someone older than you how they've lived through history.
Day 2: Research into topic (example: Civil Rights Movement), preparation of questions.
Homework: Write five oral history questions for tomorrow's interview.
Day 3: Interview with someone who can speak to the topic.
Homework: Write a brief, informal response to the interview, or do related reading.
Day 4: Interview with someone else who can speak to the topic from another perspective.

[3] In such a short unit, you won't be able to transcribe, so you may ask students to write down memorable quotes, verbatim if possible, from the interviews while they happen. You'll need to emphasize that they are NOT to be taking notes continuously during the interview, just jotting down a few quotes and mainly *listening*.

Homework: Write a brief, informal response to the interview, or do related reading.

Day 5: Compare and contrast the stories and the pre-interview research. What did you learn? Return to the unit questions and attempt to answer them, in writing or orally, individually or in groups.

Final Products:

Public: In your classroom or more publicly in the school, post students' final work.

Individual: A choice of assignments: Visually or in writing, pose an answer to some part of the unit question.

Some *selected* resources that can be useful with an oral history project

Oral History Collections

- Remembering Jim Crow and Remembering Slavery – both available with audio CDs
- Studs Terkel's books
- New Kids in Town – A collection of oral history interviews with immigrant teens.
- Lasting Echoes – An Oral Histories of Native American People
- Meatpackers: An Oral History of Black Packinghouse Workers and Their Struggle for Racial and Economic Equality
- East to America: Korean American Life Stories
- Freedom's Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories
- Oh! Freedom – A collection of oral histories about the Civil Rights Movement conducted by Washington, DC 4th graders

Books Using Oral History

Leon's Story – An autobiography of Leon Walter Tillage, who grew up as a sharecropper in the South. The book was written, in collaboration with an interviewer, based on oral history interviews, and is illustrated by beautiful woodcuts.

I Was Dreaming to Come to America – Illustrated book on Ellis Island built around excerpts from interviews in the Ellis Island Oral History Project

With Their Eyes – A collection of monologues written by Stuyvesant High School Students, based on oral history interviews conducted in the aftermath of 9/11. Based on Anna Deveare Smith's model.

Maus - A graphic novel by Art Spiegelman, based on interviews with his father about the holocaust. Explores some of the challenges of family interviewing, and is useful as part of a conversation about visually presenting oral histories.

Books for Adults on Oral History Method and Theory

The Death of Luigi Trastulli, Alessandro Portelli

Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide, Donald A. Ritchie

The Oral History Reader, edited by Perks and Thompson

Online Curriculum Guides

The internet is as full of student oral history projects and guides to oral history in the classroom and unit plans and how-to guides for adults as it is of everything else. Here are a very few we've found useful.

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/using-history/ – This is a unit for 7-12 grade students from the Library of Congress, focusing on oral history as a tool to research social history.

www.tellmeyourstories.org – This is a nice, concise guide with a section on thinking through our assumptions about the elderly.

http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/oralhistory2002 – This is an overview of oral history in the classroom, with excellent sections like "10 Questions to Ask Yourself Before Starting an Oral History Project". It also has ideas for using oral history K-12, by grade level.

www.doingoralhistory.org – This is the page of the American Century Project, which is the work of high school history students and teacher Glenn Whitman. It is full of lesson plans, forms, and content, and is especially useful for the social studies or history teacher.

Oral History Interview Release

This will confirm my understanding and agreement with NAME OF SCHOOL with respect to my participation in a series of interviews conducted by the students of NAME OF SCHOOL as part of the NAME OF Project.

1. The interviews will be taped and a transcript of the tapes will be made as resources permit (the tapes and transcript collectively called the "Work").

2. I hereby grant, assign, and transfer to the SCHOOL all rights, title and interest in and to the Work, including literary rights and copyright, provided, however, that I shall retain the non-exclusive right to copy, use and publish the Work in part or in full until my death.

3. Among any other uses of the Work that the SCHOOL may make, it shall make the Work available to students, researchers and others in accordance with applicable SCHOOL rules and general policies.

4. I understand that the SCHOOL may use my image, voice and other personal characteristics in photographs or in videotapes, audiotapes, or other media in connection with the Work. I agree that the SCHOOL may use, reproduce, exhibit, distribute, broadcast, and digitize my name, likeness, image, voice, recordings and transcripts and any other contribution by me in the Work, in whole or in part.

5. I understand that this release is binding on me, my heirs, executors and assigns.

6. This agreement contains our entire and complete understanding.

Signed: _____

Name: _____
Please Print

Address: _____

_____

Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature (if under 18): _____

ACCEPTED AND AGREED:
The SCHOOL

By: _____
Print name and title

Sign: _____

Student Work Release

This will confirm my understanding and agreement with NAME OF SCHOOL with respect to my participation in an oral history project conducted by the SCHOOL.

1. My writing, artwork, images of me, and recordings of my voice will been collected as part of this project (writing, artwork, images of me, and recordings of my voice conducting interviews are collectively called the "Work").

2. I hereby grant, assign, and transfer to the SCHOOL all rights, title and interest in and to the Work, including literary rights and copyright, provided, however, that I shall retain the non-exclusive right to copy, use and publish the Work in part or in full until my death.

3. Among any other uses of the Work that the SCHOOL may make, it shall make the Work available to students, researchers and others in accordance with applicable SCHOOL rules and general policies.

4. I understand that the SCHOOL may use my image, voice and other personal characteristics in photographs or in videotapes, audiotapes, or other media in connection with the Work. I agree that the SCHOOL may use, reproduce, exhibit, distribute, broadcast, and digitize my name, likeness, image, voice, recordings and transcripts and any other contribution by me in the Work, in whole or in part.

5. I understand that this release is binding on me, my heirs, executors and assigns.

6. This agreement contains our entire and complete understanding.

Signed: _____

Name: _____
Please Print

Address: _____

_____

Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature (if under 18): _____

ACCEPTED AND AGREED:
The SCHOOL

By: _____
Print name and title

Sign: _____

Letter of Invitation for Classroom Interviewees

April 13, 2004

Dear Ms. Smith,

This letter is to welcome you to an exciting project, called the Telling Lives Oral History Project, which is taking place in Chinatown this spring. The Columbia University Oral History Research Office, the Museum of Chinese in the Americas [MoCA], Middle School 131, and Intermediate School 126 are collaborating to bring oral historians into eight middle school classrooms to guide students in conducting oral history interviews and creating public presentations using them. MoCA will be working with the students to create a museum exhibit based on the stories they collect. Students who participate in this project will gain valuable communication and research skills as well as a deeper understanding of Chinatown's history and their own life experiences.

Oral historians conduct life history interviews within a consciously historical framework. We are interested in the ways in which individual lives intersect with history. Usually, an oral history interview begins with the interviewee's childhood and covers a range of their life experiences, although it may focus in on one particular part of their life. The interviews are transcribed and archived for future use by historians.

We are thrilled that you will be coming into the classroom to be interviewed by the students. **Your appointment is at 8:30 AM on Friday, April 16, at Middle School 131. Middle School 131 is at the corner of Hester Street and Forsyth Street in Chinatown. I will meet you by the front doors and walk you up to the classroom.** The interview will take no longer than an hour and a half, and will be over by 10-AM. The interview will be recorded and transcribed, and we will ask that you agree in advance that your interview can be used for the students' public presentations. We would very much appreciate it if you could bring in any photos or objects that you might like to share with the students or that you might consider allowing them to copy for use in their exhibits.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you might have.

Best Regards,

Amy Starecheski
Oral Historian
Telling Lives Oral History Project

Worksheet: Brainstorming Questions

Names of People in Your Group_____
Date_____

In preparation for our interview with Mr. James Macklin of The Bowery Mission, we are going to brainstorm some oral history questions for the topics listed on this sheet. You might want to use some of the starters we have posted in the room. Your group should write at least two questions for each section. Write your questions directly onto this paper. Please give this paper to the teacher at the end of class.

TOPICS

#1	Childhood at home in Virginia
#2	Childhood in foster homes
#3	Sharecropping
#4	Running Away from a foster home & traveling North
#5	Being Homeless
#6	Life after being Homeless/being HIV positive

Letter of Invitation for At-Home Interviewees

Date_____

Dear _____,

This letter is to invite you to participate in an oral history project we are doing in school. My class is getting special training from an oral historian from Columbia University in how to do oral history interviews. We will be doing interviews with people in Chinatown and around the city and using them to create a museum exhibit with the Museum of Chinese in the Americas.

Each student in my class has to conduct and record one oral history on their own as part of the project. I would like to interview you. If you agree to be interviewed, I will make an appointment when we can sit down for at least an hour to do the interview. I will be asking you questions about your life, including your childhood, your family, and experiences you have had. I will ask you to sign a release form allowing me to use our interview for our exhibit. You do not have to sign the release form if you do not want to. I would also like to see any photos or objects that would help me to understand your story, or help you to tell it.

If you have any questions about the project you can call Amy Starecheski, who is the oral history teacher. If you want to speak to someone in Chinese, let Amy know and she will arrange it. _____.

I would really appreciate you taking the time to share your story with me.

Thank you,

_____
name

Home Interview Planning Sheet

Name_____ DUE DATE

_____

Class_____

Date_____

This sheet is for you to plan the interview you will be doing on your own for homework. You need to turn this in and have us check it before you can sign out a minidisc recorder. Remember, you must interview someone who is at least 40 years old. If, after you ask THREE PEOPLE, you need help finding someone please ask Amy and she will help you.

Name of person you will interview:_____

Their **relation** to you (parent, grandparent, neighbor, teacher…):_____

Where you plan for the interview to take place: _____

When you expect the interview will take place: _____

List three topics you would like to cover in the interview and three good oral history questions you could ask for each topic. The first one is started for you:

Topic #1 Childhood

Question #1_Tell me a story about your childhood._____

Question #2_Describe your childhood home._____

Question #3_____

Topic #2_____

Question #1_____

Question #2_____

Question #3_____

Topic #3_____

Question #1_____

Question #2_____

Question #3_____

List two sources you could read, or have read, as background research for this interview. They can be books, websites, newspaper articles, oral histories, etc.….

1._____

2._____

Home Interview Checklist/Assignment Sheet

Name_____
Date_____
Class_____

Checklist of Things to Turn in With Your Interview:
You can turn these in in the envelope you got with your interviewing packet. Write your name and class on the outside of the envelope.

- ❑ Properly labeled, protected (slide the white tab over), mini disc recording
- ❑ Signed release form
- ❑ A transcription (and, if it's not in English, translation) of your favorite part of the interview.
- ❑ Evaluation sheet, completely filled in.
- ❑ Your recording kit, in the same condition in which you borrowed it!

You should also have written down your impressions of the interview experience in your Oral Historian Notebook, which will be handed in at the end of the project.

Reminders:

A properly labeled disc includes:
- ✓ the date of the interview
- ✓ your name
- ✓ your class
- ✓ the interviewee's name
- ✓ the project name (Middle School 131 Oral History Project)

In your transcription, you should try to capture as accurately as possible the speech of your interviewee. Your transcription can be typed or hand written. Follow the transcription guidelines you were given.

Please put a **track mark** at the point on your disc where your transcribed story begins and write the track mark number on your transcription so we can listen to the story. You can also use track marks to mark other parts of the interview you'd like us to listen to.

Transcribing Guidelines:

As a part of your home interview for the oral history project you must transcribe your favorite part of the interview. It can be a story, a description, an exchange between you and the interviewee – anything you like. Remember that this will take you some time. You will probably not want to leave this until the last minute.

- ✓ Begin by writing the heading. Use the format in the sample below.
- ✓ If your interview is not in English, translate it into English.
- ✓ The transcript should be at least **2 pages** long.
- ✓ It can be typed or neatly handwritten.
- ✓ Please transcribe exactly what you and your interviewee say. Remember the demonstration we did in class. It is important that you include your questions. The only thing you can leave out is if people say "like" or "you know" or "um" all the time.
- ✓ After you're done, go back and listen to it one more time to make sure your transcription is accurate.

Make sure to mark the part of the disc where your transcript starts with a track mark so we can listen to it!!!!!!!

Sample Transcription:

Interviewer: Chu Yi Hu
Interviewee: Andrew Chen
Date of Interview: March 27, 2004
Place: Mott Street, Chinatown, NYC
Track Mark: 5
Language: Cantonese

Chu Yi: This is Chu Yi Hu interviewing Andrew Stern for the Middle School 131 Oral History Project. Today is March 27, 2004, and we are in Mr. Stern's restaurant on Mott Street in Chinatown. Could you tell me your name, where and when you were born, and a little bit about your childhood?

Mr. Chen: I was born on May 1, 1940 in China…..

Sign out sheet for students in Middle School 131
to take home audio recorders

Name_____

Date_____

Class _____

I have borrowed

- One Sony mini disc recorder, #_____
- One set of clip on microphones
- One set of headphones
- One charger

And agree to return them in good condition on _____.

_____
Student signature

Returned on _____

_____
Teacher signature

Recorder #	**Checked out** - student name	Date	Class	**Checked in** - teacher name	Date		**Checked out** - student name	Date	Class	**Checked in** - teacher name	Date
1											
2											
3											
4											
5											
6											
7											
8											
9											
10											
11											
12											
13											
14											
15											

Recorder #	**Checked out** - student name	Date	Class	**Checked in** - teacher name	Date		**Checked out** - student name	Date	Class	**Checked in** - teacher name	Date
1											
2											
3											
4											
5											
6											
7											
8											
9											
10											
11											
12											
13											
14											

15											

Home Interview Evaluation Sheet

Student Name _____	0 points	3 points	5 points
Organization:			
Interview properly labeled	No label	Some information on label	Properly
Release form signed and turned in	Not turned in		Turned in or interviewee refused to sign
Home interview sheet completed and filled in	Not turned in	Partially completed – little effort	Fully completed
Interview done on time	More than a week late	Less than a week late	On time
Total Organizational Points (out of 20) _____			
	0 points	5 points	10 points
Interview Quality:			
Starts with an introduction	No intro.	Incomplete intro.	Complete intro.
Sound quality		Hard to hear	Clear
Asks open-ended questions		Some good questions, many short-answer	Many thoughtful open questions, closed questions to clarify and expand
Asks follow-up questions		Seems to follow a list of questions, few follow-up questions	Many follow-up questions, is listening and thinking actively
Shows historical knowledge		Does not show historical knowledge	Asks historical questions
Closes with thank you and invitation to add anything to the interview	Does not close this way – interview just ends		Closes properly
Total for Interview Quality (out of 60) _____			
	0 points	3 points	5 points
Transcription:			
Is long enough	No transcript	Too short	Long enough
Includes questions	No transcript		Includes questions

Transcribes verbatim	No transcript	Sometimes paraphrases	Transcribes verbatim
Usage	No transcript	Some errors	Few errors, do not affect clarity
Total for Transcription (out of 20) _____	**Final Grade (out of 100) _____** ***Comments on back.***		

Ellis Island Field Trip Handout

Your class will be taking a trip to Ellis Island today. We will be taking the subway to Battery Park and then taking a ferry to Ellis Island. We will have to go through metal detectors to get on the ferry, so make sure not to bring any big backpacks, weapons, etc….. Also do not bring money, as we will not have time to visit the gift shop.

Do bring:
Warm clothes (it can be cool on the water).
A lunch.
Your oral historian journal.
A pen or pencil.
This piece of paper.

Schedule:
8:20 AM – meet at school in your English classroom.
8:45 AM – leave school
9:30 AM—arrive at Battery Park
10 AM – catch the ferry
11 AM – arrive at Ellis Island, watch a movie called "Island of Hope, Island of Tears"
11:30-12:15 – lunch
12:30-1:30 – visit to Oral History Library
1:30-3 – visit exhibits with your group
3 PM – catch ferry back to Manhattan

On the Ferry –
Write answers to these questions in your oral history journal: Can you see Ellis Island? What does it look like? How would you describe it?

Oral History Library –
The oral historian, Janet Levine, has agreed to talk to us about the oral history collection at Ellis Island. After her talk you will have a chance to explore the collection using listening stations. *In your oral historian journals, write down the name, nationality, and birth date of one or two of the people whose interviews you listen to/read. Make some notes about what you liked, didn't like, thought was interesting, could've done better, wanted to hear, would've asked, etc…..* A few interviews I thought were interesting were Joseph Gallatin, Beatrice Agro, and Linda Wu.

The Exhibits –
Many of the exhibits at Ellis Island use oral history. As a group, with your chaperone, you have an hour and a half to explore some of the exhibits in the museum. Please pay special attention to how the exhibits are organized, how oral history is used, what other methods are used to tell the story, what decisions the exhibit designers made, what you like, what you don't like, what you might be able to use in your own presentations, what biases the exhibit designers show, how the experiences portrayed in the exhibits relate to your own, and anything else you find interesting. *Take notes!*

For Homework –

1. Write up some of *your impressions of Ellis Island* in your Oral Historian Journal. You can be creative here – use whatever form you want (a letter, an essay, a poem, a story, a journal entry…).
2. Write down *one thing you learned about oral history or museum exhibit* design on the trip.

Book Chapter Planning Sheet

Chapter Title_____

Name	**Writing (be specific!)**	**Visual (photo or art)**
(example) **Amy Starecheski**	My 9/11 story and how it relates to Rameen Moshref's	Photo of Rameen Newspaper article about hate crimes after 9/11

Each person in your group MUST write something for your chapter.

Here are *some* choices of genres to write in. You DO NOT have to choose one of these:

- poem
- song
- story from interviewee's perspective
- story from another perspective
- your opinions about the interview or the story, or your experiences relating to the story

Your group should also choose at least 1 part of the transcript to use. You may edit it.

We will be using page(s) _____